NATION

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BUSINESS

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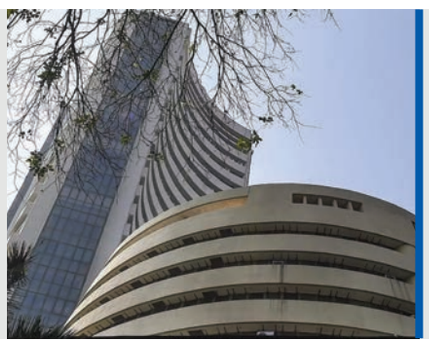

SPORTS

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Govt lacks 2/3rd majority to pass ONOE Bill

Bill was introduced in LS with 269 MPs favouring it and 198 against; Will be sent to JPC

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

The Lok Saha on Tuesday voted divisively on two bills that would amend the Constitution to hold simultaneous elections in the country, with 269 members favouring their introduction and 198 opposing after it was tabled in the Lower House.

The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill was introduced after a nearly 90-minute debate, with the Opposition terming the move "anti-constitutional" and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal asserting that the legislation would not tamper with the powers enjoyed by states.

The Centre needs 307 votes out of 461 votes to achieve two-thirds majority to pass the bill.

Legislation to amend the Constitution requires approval from two-third of the members present and voting. In that case, if today's vote were meant to pass the bill, the proposal would have lost.

In fact, even at full strength the BJP and its allies, the National Democratic Alliance, do not have the numbers - it has only 293 MPs in its camp. Congress-led INDIA bloc has 234.

Though a two-thirds majority is not required to introduce a bill in Parliament, the numbers on Tuesday in Lok Sabha was indicative of the tough road ahead of BJP's floor managers.

Amid uproar by the Opposition, Home Minister Amit Shah told Lok Sabha that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said during a meeting of the Union Cabinet that the bill should be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for wider deliberations at every level.

The government is likely to move a resolution to refer the bill to the JPC on Wednesday in Lok Sabha.

Opposition Congress, DMK, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, NCP-SP, Shiv Sena-UBT, AIMIM among others objected to the introduction of the bill contending that it was an assault on the basic structure of the Constitution. During the consultations held by former president Ram Nath Kovind-led high level committee on 'One Nation, One Elections', 32 political parties supported the measure and 15 parties opposed it. YSRCP, which has four members in Lok Sabha, is the only non-NDA party to have declared support for the bill. BJD, another fence sitter, is yet to spell out its stand. BJD failed to open its account in Lok Sabha in elections this year, but has seven members in Rajya Sabha.

Meghwal also introduced The Union Territories Amendment Bill, which seeks to align elections in the Union territories of Puducherry, Delhi, and Jammu and Kashmir with the Lok Sabha polls. After bills were introduced, Congress member Manickam Tagore pointed out that the government did not have a two-thirds majority among the 461 members who took part in the voting on Tuesday. Amid the opposition onslaught against the bill, BJP allies TDP and Shiv Sena declared "unwavering support" for the legislation. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, Shah and Meghwal held forth from the government side.

MPs in the Lok Sabha during the Winter session in New Delhi on Tuesday; (Below) Voting at the introduction stage of two Bill on simultaneous elections in the Lok Sabha showed BJP did not have two-thirds majority required to pass a constitutional amendment *PHOTO: PTI*

BJP sends notice to 20 MPs

BJP will send notices to MPs who were not present in the Lok Sabha during the introduction of the "One Country One Election Bill. More than 20 BJP MPs were absent during the division of the house, sources said. The party had earlier sent a three-line whip to its Lok Sabha members, directing them to be present in the House. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

On last day of Constitution debate, Shah tears into Cong

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday attacked Congress in the Rajya Sabha, saying the party treated the Constitution as the "private fiefdom" of one family and "played fraud" with Parliament.

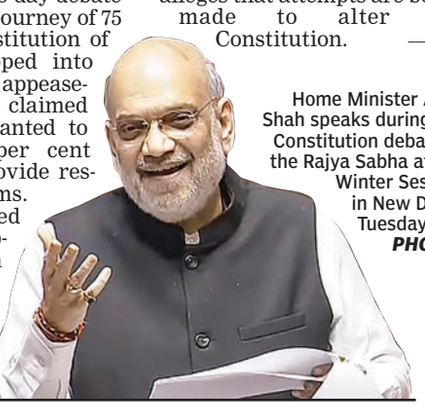
He argued if Congress could change the Constitution 77 times and even introduce a clause that curtails freedom of expression, they cannot object to the "One Nation One Election" Bill on the ground that it would require constitutional amendment.

Concluding a two-day debate on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India", Shah ripped into Congress for its appeasement politics and claimed that the party wanted to breach the 50 per cent quota limit to provide reservation to Muslims.

He also asked Congress if it supported the Muslim personal law and alleged that the party never worked for the welfare of the backward classes.

Criticising the Congress for bringing in reservation on the basis of religion in two states ruled by it, Shah termed it "unconstitutional".

Shah took a jibe at the Congress for its frequent references to Dr. BR Ambedkar. He remarked that if the Congress had remembered God with the same dedication, it would have secured a place in heaven for seven rebirths. Taking a swipe at Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, he said said that a "54-year-old masquerading as a young leader" alleges that attempts are being made to alter the Constitution. *—PTI*



Home Minister Amit Shah speaks during the Constitution debate in the Rajya Sabha at the Winter Session in New Delhi, Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

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NTA to not hold job exam, just entrance: Pradhan

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

In a significant policy shift, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced on Tuesday that the National Testing Agency (NTA) will no longer conduct recruitment exams from 2025, concentrating solely on entrance tests for higher education. This decision follows a series of alleged irregularities and leaks in critical examinations, including the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET).

Pradhan disclosed that the NTA is set to undergo restructuring next year, with new positions being created to facilitate this transformation. The Common University Entrance Test - Undergraduate (CUET-UG) will continue to be administered annually. This move stems from recommendations by a high-level panel, chaired by former ISRO chief R. Radhakrishnan, which noted the agency's overextension in the past.

The committee emphasised that the NTA should primarily focus on entrance examinations and suggested a reorganisation into ten verticals that address technology, test security, and operations. A proposal for a "DIGI-EXAM" system, employing biometric and AI-based data analytics for candidate verification, was also recommended. To enhance exam integrity, the panel proposed establishing a network of 400-500 testing centres nationwide, ensuring accessible and standardised facilities for computer-based testing (CBT). This initiative aims to ensure the transparent and smooth conduct of examinations, particularly in light of the controversies surrounding recent tests, including NEET-UG and UGC-NET, both of which have been subjected to active investigations by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). *—PTI*

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Karnataka tables Labour Fund Bill in Assembly

BELAGAVI, 17 DEC

The Karnataka government on Tuesday tabled the Labour Welfare Fund (Amendment) Bill aiming to increase the contribution of employees and employers and the government to the Labour Welfare Fund. "It is considered necessary further to amend the Karnataka Labour Welfare Fund Act, 1965 to increase the rate of contribution payable by the concerned employees, employers and the State government to the Labour Welfare Fund," the objective of the bill said. The Assembly on Tuesday approved the second instalment of the supplementary estimate for the current fiscal year, totalling Rs 5,317.83 crore. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Doval in China to restore strained ties

BEIJING, 17 DEC

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval arrived in Beijing on Tuesday to participate in the 23rd round of Special Representatives talks aimed at mending strained bilateral ties between India and China. These discussions, set for Wednesday, come after a prolonged military standoff in eastern Ladakh that has lasted over four years.

Doval is expected to engage in talks with his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, focusing on key issues surrounding an October 21 agreement for disengagement and patrolling in eastern Ladakh. As anticipation builds ahead of the discussions, China expressed its readiness to honour commitments made during the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in Kazan, Russia, on October 24.

Ajit Doval *PHOTO: X*

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian stated, "China stands ready to work with India to honour our commitments and promote our bilateral relations back to sound and steady growth." The Indian External Affairs Ministry reiterated that the talks will centre on managing peace in border areas and seeking a fair resolution to the boundary issue. The significant meeting marks the first structured engagement in five years, following the last session in 2019 in Delhi. Since the military standoff began in May 2020, culminating in a deadly clash in June, relations between the two nations have been largely stagnant, aside from trade. As both sides navigate a path forward, these talks represent a crucial step towards rebuilding trust. *—PTI*

HC JUDGE APPEARS BEFORE SC OVER 'MAJORITY' BARB

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Allahabad High Court judge Shekhar Kumar Yadav, who purportedly gave controversial statements at a Vishwa Hindu Parishad function, appeared before the Supreme Court collegium on Tuesday, sources said.

According to the sources, Yadav appeared before the collegium headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and was asked to put forth his version on the statements made.

The top court on 10 December took note of news reports over the statements and sought a report from the Allahabad High Court on the issue.

At VHP event on 8 December, among other things, Justice Yadav said the main aim of the uniform civil code was to promote social harmony, gender equality and secularism.

The following day, videos of the judge speaking on provocative issues, including the law working according to the majority, were circulated widely on social media, prompting strong reactions from several quarters. *—PTI*

Meta fined €251M over 2018 data breach

LONDON, 17 DEC

Meta, the parent company of Facebook, has been hit with fines amounting to Euro 251 million following an investigation into a 2018 data breach that compromised millions of user accounts. Ireland's Data Protection Commission concluded its inquiry into the incident, which saw hackers exploiting vulnerabilities in the platform's code to obtain digital keys, known as "access tokens." As Meta's principal privacy regulator, the Irish watchdog found multiple violations of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The breach initially affected around 50 million accounts, later revised to approximately 29 million, including 3 million in Europe. *—PTI*

India supports France amid Cyclone Chido

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed profound sadness over the destruction caused by Cyclone Chido in Mayotte, emphasising India's solidarity with France during this challenging time. In a statement posted on X, Modi conveyed his condolences to the victims and their families, Cyclone Chido has been described as the worst to hit Mayotte in nearly a century, prompting France to deploy ships and military aircraft to provide rescue workers and essential supplies to the affected region. Reports suggest that the death toll could reach hundreds, or even thousands, as authorities assess the damage. *—PTI*

1 FOREIGNER ARRESTED

In biggest haul, CCB seizes drugs worth ₹24 cr

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

The Central Crime Branch (CCB) unit of Bengaluru Police has busted a drug racket run by a foreign citizen in the city and recovered 12 kg of MDMA crystals worth an estimated Rs 24 crore from the woman's possession, police said on Tuesday.

This was the largest drug seizure by the CCB unit in the state so far, officials said. Besides the MDMA, the police also seized several mobile phones and 70 Airtel SIM cards.

The Narcotics Control Wing of the CCB had received information that a foreign woman residing in TC Palya, under the jurisdiction of KR Puram Police Station, had set up a shop selling food and grocery items, where African nationals frequented, said Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda.

Based on this information, the CCB team raided the place on 13 December and arrested the woman, the officer said. "She was selling illegal drugs. After the CCB Narcotics team arrested her, they interrogated her, got the details, and seized 12kg of drugs. We are searching for the supplier," he said.

"The Narcotics Control Wing of the CCB team has successfully cracked an MDMA Crystal drug network. It is an international network. They have successfully recovered 12 kgs of pure white and yellow MDMA. The total value is approximately Rs 24 crore. This is one of the biggest recoveries in Bengaluru and Karnataka," said Dayananda.

According to the officer, an investigation found that the racket brought the drugs from a Mumbai-based woman in soap packets, dry fish boxes, and so on. Their customers included software engineers and foreigners.

"She has confessed to selling drugs. The suspect came to Bengaluru on a business visa five years ago, and now the visa has also expired," he said, adding that a case under NDPS Act and Foreigners Act has been registered. *—PTI*

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda inspects the seized drugs, in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Panic after MUDA complainant goes missing

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

RTI activist Snehamayi Krishna has reportedly been missing since an FIR was filed against him by KAS officer and Secretary of the Chamundeshwari Temple Development Authority, MJ Roopa. This situation unfolded following a series of mutual complaints related to allegations of misconduct surrounding temple offerings.

Krishna, a complainant in the MUDA land scam implicating Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and others, had previously accused temple administrator Roopa of allegedly 'stealing and selling' sarees offered to the deity Chamundeshwari Devi by devotees. He lodged a complaint regarding this matter at the Krishnaraja police station in Mysuru on 12 December.

Roopa filed a complaint on 14 December, claiming that Krishna obstructed her official duties during a site inspection. Subsequently, the police registered an FIR against Krishna based on her allegations.

Snehamayi Krishna *PHOTO: X*

Police revealed that his mobile phone had been switched off for the past three days. However, it was later discovered that Krishna had filed an application in the High Court contesting the obstruction of duty allegations made by Roopa. On Tuesday, the Karnataka High Court granted a stay order on the FIR. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

KSDL pays record Rs 109 crore as profit to govt

BELAGAVI, 17 DEC

Minister MB Patil and State Soaps and Detergents Limited Chairman Nada Gowda presented a dividend cheque of Rs 108.62 crore from KSDL to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday. A statement shared by the office of the State Minister for Large and Medium Industries said that this amount represents 30 per cent of KSDL's profit of Rs 362.07 crore for the fiscal year 2023-24. "This is the highest dividend ever paid by the enterprise in its history. Additionally, a cheque of Rs 5 crore was handed over to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund," it stated. Siddaramaiah praised KSDL's "consistent profitability" since 2019-20. "The enterprise, which paid a dividend of Rs 15.91 crore five years ago, has now presented a dividend of nearly Rs 109 crore," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

SUN to provide EV battery swapping on metro premises

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation has partnered with SUN Mobility, an electric vehicle energy services company, to provide EV battery-swapping facility for the vehicles of commuters in the metro premises, the company said on Tuesday. "Strategically located in parking areas and auto stands, these innovative battery-swapping stations cater to passengers traveling to and from metro trains, providing efficient and sustainable transportation options. Over the last month, these stations have collectively supported an impressive 1,25,000 kms of travel, catering to a remarkable 19,000 vehicles throughput," they said. "On average, each BMRCL station has served approximately 2800 vehicles, including 2300 2-wheeler trips and 500 3-wheeler trips," a statement released by the company said. This partnership will enhance convenience and accessibility for the metro commuters. Initial installations along the green and purple lines have yielded remarkable success, with seven stations already operational and 12 more slated for launch, it added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

DPS organises 1-day trek to Ramadevara Hills

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

Forty-six NCC Cadets and 137 scouts and guides from Delhi Public School Bangalore South embarked on a one-day trek to Ramadevara Hills (Vulture Sanctuary) in Ramanagara on 16 December. The group set off at 7am, covering a distance of 45 km in about 1 hour and 40 minutes. The trek began with a climb of 300 to 400 steps, passing two temples before reaching the top, 3,800 feet above sea level, famously known as Sholay Hills. After an hour spent enjoying the scenic views, the group began their descent. During the descent, the participants took part in a Swachh Bharat Abhiyan initiative, collecting eight bags of plastic waste for proper disposal, which was handed over to BBMP. After the trek, the group had lunch at 2:45pm before heading back to school, where they arrived safely by 4:30pm. *—Salar News*

16 organisations raise quota concerns

Memos on reservations submitted to govt

BELAGAVI, 17 DEC

A group of 16 organisations, including Akhil Bharat Charmakar Mahasabha, Akhil Karnataka Bhovi Vaddar Yuva Vedike and Social Democratic Party of India, on Tuesday submitted their memorandums to the government, seeking its attention towards reservation-related problems faced by their communities.

Thousands of activists from 12 of these organisations also held a protest outside the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha demanding that their demands be met.

The activists of the Yuva Vedike opposed the implementation of the state government's Scheduled Caste internal reservation policy. Advocate Y Kotresh, the state president of the Vedike, said implementing the policy would be unfair to 99 backward castes, including the minority subcastes of Vaddar such as Bhovi, Koncha and Korama.

The Mahasabha members demanded that justice be done by implementing internal reservation among the 18 subcastes of the Dohar community, including Chammar, Dohar, and Machigar. Mahasabha leaders BY Pawar and Sanjeev Lokapur said the Charmakar reservation should be implemented among the lower castes.

Activists from these 12 organisations held a protest outside Suvarna Vidhana Soudha on Tuesday *REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO*

Akhil Karnataka Hadapad Appanna Samaj Seva Sangh members demanded that the government set up a corporation for the development of the community. They also demanded 2A reservation for the people of the Lingayat Hadapad community.

The Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), led by Maqsood Makandar, demanded implementation of internal reservation for Scheduled Castes and urgent measures to protect Waqf property in the state.

Karnataka State Dalit Sangharsh Samiti urged the state government to introduce reservation in outsourced jobs. They also demanded that the SCP and TSP funds be used for the development of Dalits in the state.

Activists of the Karnataka State Kuduvakkaliga Abhivruddhi Seva Sangha sought the community's inclusion in the 3A reservation for the backward class.

Karnataka State Aided Schools and Colleges Pension-Deprived Employees Association and Karnataka State Deaf Welfare Association of Honnenahalli in Chikmagalur demanded free bus travel, monthly maintenance allowance of Rs 5,000, free health services and free distribution of hearing aids for people with hearing impairment. Government Pre-University College Guest Lecturers' Association, Safai Karmachari Parishad, also submitted memorandums listing their demands to the government. *—Salar News*

BJP protests in Belagavi on Tuesday *PHOTO:X/JP4KARNATAKA*

BJP walks out over RDPR Bill

BELAGAVI, 17 DEC

The Opposition BJP on Tuesday staged a walkout from the Karnataka Assembly opposing the State Rural Development and Panchayat Raj University (Amendment) Bill.

The bill seeks to replace Governor with the Chief Minister as chancellor "for better administration and functioning".

BJP MLA CN Ashwath Narayan said this was not a progressive bill and appealed to the Congress government to avoid confrontation with the Raj Bhavan.

Another BJP MLA Araga Jnanendra requested the government to revisit its decision.

Shivamogga MLA SN Channabasappa alleged that this move reflects the mindset of hatred of the ruling party.

Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge dismissed the allegations. He said, "This bill is not politically motivated. This is for the better administration, coordination and smooth functioning of the university." Kharge said there is no law in the country which says only the Governor should be the Chancellor of a university.

Govt withdraws Town & Country Planning Amendment Bill

The State government withdrew the Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Bill on Tuesday.

Urban Development Minister Suresh BS informed the Assembly that the decision was made after identifying some flaws in the bill. *—PTI*

Mysuru Authority Bill tabled in Assembly

BELAGAVI, 17 DEC

The Mysuru Development Authority Bill was tabled in Karnataka Assembly on Tuesday.

Moved by the Urban Development Minister Suresh BS, the bill seeks to replace the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) with Mysuru Development Authority.

Unlike MUDA, which had all the legislators from Mysuru and the police commissioner as its members, the MDA will have only two legislators from Karnataka.

According to the bill, MDA will consist a Chairperson, a Commissioner who will be ex-officio member, a finance member, an engineer from Karnataka Engineering Service, a town planner, an architect, a deputy secretary rank officer from the Urban Development Department, two legislators from Karnataka, four members including a woman and one member of SC/ST community, one representative each from the Karnataka Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Board, ESCOM and Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation.

The MUDA was recently hit by the site allotment scam. *—PTI*

Cong prepares for centenary of Gandhi's 1924 Belagavi session

BELAGAVI, 17 DEC

AICC general secretary KC Venugopal on Tuesday reviewed preparations for the centenary celebrations of the 1924 Indian National Congress session, presided over by Mahatma Gandhi.

The party has decided to hold a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) on 26 December in Belagavi and a public meeting on 27 December.

AICC general secretary in charge, Randeep Singh Surjewala, and the party's national treasurer and Rajya Sabha MP from the state, Ajay Maken, also arrived along with Venugopal.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister and state congress Chief DK Shivakumar, ministers, and party legislators attended a meeting to discuss the event at the party office.

Venugopal told, "The AICC is holding an extended working committee meeting on 26 December, followed by a massive rally on 27 December."

CM Siddaramaiah and AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal during a meeting on centenary celebration, in Belagavi on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Speaking to reporters, Venugopal said the Belagavi conference is going to be the "biggest turning point" in Indian political history and for the Congress party.

"We need to make the biggest decision from Belagavi on how to fight the dictatorship of the BJP and Narendra Modi," he said.

Venugopal alleged that the saffron party was setting up a "Nafrat ka Bazaar" (market of hate) everywhere.

Shivakumar said that as part of the government programme, the statue of Mahatma Gandhi will be unveiled on 26 December on the premises of the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha by the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge. *—PTI*

BJP is trying for 1 nation, no poll, says Venugopal

BELAGAVI, 17 DEC

Targeting the BJP-led government at the Centre over the introduction of two bills in Lok Sabha that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections, AICC general secretary KC Venugopal on Tuesday said the clear intention behind 'one nation, one election' is "one nation, no election".

Terming 'one nation, one election' as "not practical", he expressed doubts about the bills getting passed in Parliament.

To sabotage the entire democratic process gradually, they are bringing this new idea of one nation, one election," Venugopal said.

He said, "Karnataka has its own speciality. Kerala has its speciality, similarly Manipur and Jammu Kashmir too have their own speciality. Unity in diversity is the beauty of this country. These people (BJP) don't believe in democracy, diversity."

Opposition parties dubbed the draft laws as an attack on the federal structure. *—PTI*

RENUKASWAMY MURDER CASE

Pavithra Gowda walks out of Parappana Agrahara central prison on Tuesday after getting bail *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

City police to challenge Darshan's bail in SC

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

City Police Commissioner B Dayananda on Tuesday said that efforts are on to file an appeal in the Supreme Court, against the bail granted to Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa and other accused in the Renukaswamy murder case.

A proposal will be submitted to the state government in this regard, he said.

The High Court on Friday granted conditional bail to Darshan, who is accused number 2 in the case.

The bench of Justice S Vishwajith Shetty had also granted bail to Darshan's friend Pavithra Gowda, who is accused number 1, and other accused - R Nagaraju, Anu Kumar alias Anu, Lakshman M, Jagadeesh alias Jagga and Pradoosh S Rao.

"In connection with the Renukaswamy murder case, with regards to bail that has been granted, efforts are on to file an appeal in the Supreme Court. We will submit a proposal to the government on this," Dayananda told reporters here.

Darshan was arrested on 11 June. Pavithra Gowda and 15 other co-accused in the case were arrested during the same period.

The 47-year-old actor was already out on interim bail for medical reasons.

He had walked out of Ballari jail on October 30 after being imprisoned for more than four months, hours after the Karnataka High Court gave him relief for six weeks on medical grounds, to undergo spine surgery.

Pavithra Gowda, on Tuesday walked out of the Parappana Agrahara central prison here on bail, after completing formalities.

According to police, 33-year-old Renukaswamy, a fan of the actor, had sent obscene messages to his friend Pavithra Gowda, which enraged Darshan, allegedly leading to his murder. *—PTI*

HDD calls upon Parliament to rethink quota policies

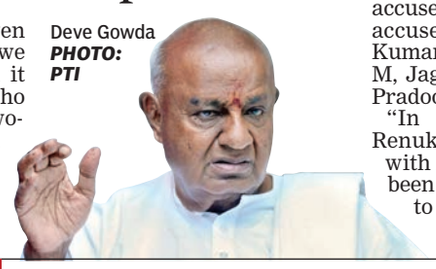
NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Former prime minister and JD(S) leader HD Deve Gowda on Tuesday called upon Parliament to contemplate whether reservation should continue to be given on the basis of caste or it should be changed to economic criteria.

Participating in a discussion on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India" in Rajya Sabha, Deve Gowda said, "The House itself has to apply its mind on what all happened in the past and whether we should give reservation only on the basis of poverty in this country."

People are suffering "even with the reservations that we have given in the past and it has not lifted the people who are still suffering for two-square meals a day", he said.

He said the Constitution drafted by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar has withstood the test of time. *—PTI*



Deve Gowda *PHOTO: PTI*

CRIME PATROL

History-sheeter beaten to death by kin

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

A 28-year-old man wanted in at least four criminal cases was beaten to death by his relatives when he allegedly threatened to kill his infant son on Monday night at his house in the Siddapura police station limits, police said.

Police identified the deceased as Salman, a man with a history of criminal behaviour and a history-sheet opened at the Siddapura police station in his name. He worked as a metal fabricator and resided in a slum in Dayananda Nagar and was frequently involved in disputes with his wife and relatives, they said.

The incident took place on Monday night when Salman's in-laws and other relatives visited his house to mediate after a quarrel between him and his wife. However, during the discussion, Salman reportedly began abusing his wife and her family members.

An official involved in the investigation told Salar News that the situation escalated when the family contacted the police. In a fit of rage, Salman set fire to a relative's two-wheeler parked outside the house and fled before the police arrived. The police registered a case against him.

Salman returned home around 3.15am and picked up his 20-day-old son while wielding a knife. He allegedly threatened to harm the infant unless his relatives did not withdraw their complaint against him.

In the ensuing scuffle, the relatives managed to rescue the baby. Salman, overpowered and beaten up by his relatives, suffered severe head injuries. He was rushed to NIMHANS, but succumbed to injuries around 10.15am, police said. *—Salar News*

IT RAIDS ON BUILDERS OVER 'TAX EVASION'

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

Income Tax (IT) officials carried out surprise raids across the city early on Tuesday, targeting prominent business establishments, particularly builders, suspected of tax evasion and financial irregularities. The operation, which began at dawn, involved inspections at key locations, leaving several businessmen in the city startled.

This marks the third such raid in Bengaluru in recent months, as part of ongoing efforts to clamp down on suspected tax evasion. The previous operation, on November 27, focused on branches of businesses based in Delhi and Mumbai, where IT officials meticulously examined financial documents and records.

While the findings from Tuesday's raids have not yet been disclosed, investigations are still underway. *—Salar News*

10 arrested in Rs 89 lakh online investment scam

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

The Cyber Economics and Narcotics (CEN) police have arrested 10 people for an online investment scam that defrauded unsuspecting victims of Rs 88.83 lakh, officials said on Tuesday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Bengaluru North) Saidulu Adavath said the accused lured victims by posting stock market investment advertisements in Facebook and WhatsApp groups under the names of Brandywine Group and ES Brandywine Group Marketing.

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda said the police recovered 51 mobile phones, 27 debit cards, 108 bank passbooks, 480 SIM cards, 2 laptops, 2 CPUs, 48 bank account-linked QR codes, 42 rubber stamps, 103 business and GST-related documents and 230 current account documents. *—Salar News*

HC QUASHES FIR AGAINST VIJAYENDRA

BENGALURU, 17 DEC

The High Court on Tuesday quashed the FIR registered against BJP state President BY Vijayendra, who was accused of extorting money under the pretext of electoral bonds.

The FIR, filed by Bengaluru police in September based on a complaint by city activist Adarsh R Iyer, also named Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Enforcement Directorate officials, and BJP office-bearers at state and national levels.

At the time, Vijayendra was BJP Vice President, while Nalin Kumar Kateel, another accused, was the State BJP President. On 3 December, the court quashed the case against Kateel. "The extortion racket under the garb of electoral bonds was orchestrated hand-in-glove with BJP officials," the complainant alleged. *—PTI*

Parl Panel bats for MSP to protect farmers' interests

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

A parliamentary panel on Tuesday recommended the government implement a legally binding minimum support price (MSP) for agricultural produce, arguing that such a measure could significantly reduce farmer suicides and provide crucial financial stability. The Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food Processing, headed by Congress MP Charanjit Singh Channi, submitted a comprehensive report to Parliament highlighting the potential benefits of a legally guaranteed MSP. Currently, the government fixes MSP for 23 commodities based on the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices. The panel argued that a legally binding MSP would not only safeguard farmers' livelihoods but promote rural economic growth. *—PTI*

BJP to get new president by February end

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to elect a new president to succeed JP Nadda by the end of February. A senior party official indicated that the ongoing organisational elections are on schedule, with polling expected to be completed in over half of the state units by mid-January. With the tenures of nearly 60 per cent of the BJP's state unit presidents coming to an end, replacements are anticipated by mid-January. The party's constitution requires that organisational polls be finalised in at least half of its state units before the national president election can commence. *—PTI*

UP Cong alleges 'house arrest' ahead of assembly

LUCKNOW, 17 DEC

The Uttar Pradesh Police have escalated security measures in anticipation of a planned protest by the Congress party, which aims to "besiege" the state assembly on Wednesday. In a bold claim, Congress district chief Pradeep Singhal reported that he and over 100 party leaders have been placed under house arrest in Amethi. Singhal condemned the police's actions as "undemocratic," asserting that all citizens in a democracy should be free to express their views. "This government is attempting to silence the voice of the people," he remarked. The police issued a notice under Section 168 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, cautioning Congress workers against potential disruptions leading to legal action. General Secretary Anil Yadav stated that they planned to protest issues like unemployment and rising prices. Singhal vowed to ensure that "the people's voices reach the assembly" despite the intimidation tactics employed by the government. *—PTI*

Oppn calls ONOE Bill anti-Constitutional

Oppn alleges BJP is trying to take away states' power, end regional parties through ONOE

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

The Opposition on Tuesday claimed the Bill on holding simultaneous polls was against federalism and "anti-constitutional", and said the voting at its introduction stage in the Lok Sabha showed the BJP lacked the two-third majority required to pass a constitutional amendment.

Opposition Congress, DMK, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, NCP-SP, Shiv Sena-UBT, AIMIM among others objected to the introduction of the bill contending that it was an assault on the basic structure of the Constitution.

As Meghwal moved a motion for introduction of the bill, Congress member Manish Tewari expressed his opposition and termed the move an assault on the basic structure doctrine that stipulates certain features of the Constitution are beyond the amending power of Parliament.

Tewari warned that implementing simultaneous elections would require amending Articles 83 and 172, which guarantee the fixed tenure of legislative bodies. He argued that such changes violate the basic structure doctrine. Earlier, Trinamool Congress member Kalyan Banerjee said the bills linked the tenure of state assemblies to that of Lok Sabha, thus undermining the mandate of the people.

One nation one election bill was tabled in Parliament's Winter Session, in New Delhi, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

"The state government is not subordinate to the central government or Parliament. The bills take away the autonomy of the state assembly. It is not an election reform but just the fulfilment of one gentleman's desire and dream," he said.

DMK member TR Baalu said, "The electors have the right to elect the government for five years and this right cannot be curtailed with simultaneous elections."

"This bill is aimed at maximising political gain and convenience. This bill will finish off regional parties," All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader Asaduddin Owaisi said.

Shiv Sena-UBT member Anil Desai said the bill was an assault on the federal structure. He also wanted the Election Commissioners to be directly elected by the people.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor also hit out at government, saying voting at the introduction stage showed BJP did not have the two-third majority required to pass a constitutional amendment.

" The vast majority of the opposition parties have opposed this Bill and the grounds are very many, it is a violation of the federal structure of the Constitution. Why should a state government fall if the central government falls?" he told reporters on the Parliament premises. *—PTI*

Nadda: Cong forced BJP to bring ONOE Bill

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Union Health Minister JP Nadda speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter Session, in New Delhi, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Rajya Sabha Leader of the House JP Nadda attacked Congress on Tuesday for amending the Constitution for its own benefit and alleged that its past actions of "toppling governments" in states led to staggered polls, creating the necessity for 'One Nation One Election' bill.

Participating in a debate in the Upper House on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India", BJP president accused the Congress of practising politics of appeasement and attempting to bring in religion-based reservations, a charge which was vociferously contested by the opposition party.

BJP leader quoted BR Ambedkar to say "however good a Constitution may be, if those who are implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad", and added that the "bad lot has interfered with the Constitution many times".

"We have to bring the One Nation One Election bill because you toppled elected government in states, and elections had to be held," Nadda said.

Meanwhile, Nadda emphasised that a well-crafted constitution can falter in the hands of those who implement it poorly.

He accused what he termed the "bad lot" of repeatedly interfering with the Indian Constitution. *—PTI*

LOWER Q2 GDP GROWTH IS TEMPORARY BLIP; ECONOMY TO IMPROVE AHEAD: FM

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attributed India's lower-than-expected GDP growth of 5.4 per cent in the second quarter to a "temporary blip," expressing confidence in robust economic recovery in the upcoming quarters. During a Lok Sabha debate on supplementary demands for grants, she noted that India has maintained an average GDP growth rate of 8.3 per cent over the last three years, with first-quarter growth recorded at 6.7 per cent.

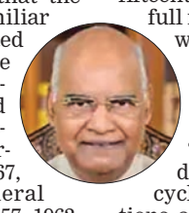
Sitharaman highlighted that despite challenges, India remains the fastest-growing major economy globally, thanks to the resilience of its citizens. She emphasised that there is no widespread slowdown in the manufacturing sector, as nearly half of the 23 sectors surveyed remain strong.

The Minister announced a 6.4 per cent increase in capital expenditure from July to October 2024, with total allocations reaching Rs 11.11 lakh crore this fiscal year. Reflecting on inflation, she praised the government's efforts in controlling it, with retail inflation at 4.8 per cent, the lowest since the Covid pandemic, and core inflation at a decade low of 3.6 per cent. *—PTI*

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi along with Opposition MPs on Tuesday donned a bag supporting Bangladeshi minorities in the Parliament a day after she was criticised for carrying a bag with 'Palestine' written on it *PHOTO: PTI*

ONOE POLLS NOT NEW IN INDIA, WERE HELD FROM 1951-1967: CENTRE

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC



As the introduction of bills to facilitate simultaneous elections approaches, the government has reiterated that the concept is not unfamiliar to India. It highlighted that after the Constitution's adoption, Lok Sabha and state assembly elections were held concurrently from 1951 to 1967, encompassing general elections in 1951-52, 1957, 1962, and 1967.

However, the cycle of synchronised elections faced interruptions in 1968 and 1969 due to the premature dissolution of several State Legislative Assemblies. The Fourth Lok Sabha also experienced a premature dissolution in 1970, leading to fresh elections in 1971. While some Lok Sabha terms, such as the eighth, tenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth, managed to last the full five years, many others were dissolved early.

The government described these premature dissolutions and term extensions as a "recurring challenge," disrupting the previous cycle of simultaneous elections and resulting in a staggered electoral schedule across the nation.

According to a report from the high-level committee on "one nation, one election," simultaneous polls could foster consistency in governance. *—PTI*

Am I a toy?: Bhujbal after Cabinet exclusion

MUMBAI, 17 DEC

Senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal on Tuesday launched a veiled attack on party president Ajit Pawar over his exclusion from the new council of ministers, claiming Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis was in favour of his induction in the cabinet.

He said Ajit Pawar, the NCP president, makes decisions for the party like Fadnavis for the BJP and Eknath Shinde for the Shiv Sena.

The prominent OBC leader said he wasn't disappointed about not being made a minister but felt humiliated by his treatment.

"I accepted the suggestion to contest Lok Sabha elections from Nashik. When I wanted to be in the Rajya Sabha earlier this year, I was asked to fight the assembly elections. I was offered a Rajya Sabha seat eight days ago which I rejected.

CM Devendra Fadnavis meets Shiv Sena(UBT)'s Uddhav Thackery for the first time after Maharashtra elections on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Bhaskar Jadhav's comments on the governor's role in government formation drew sharp response from the treasury benches in the Maharashtra legislative assembly on Tuesday.

Congress members boycotted the Maharashtra assembly proceedings. *—PTI*

Ready to resign as M'rashtra Cong chief: Nana Patole

NAGPUR, 17 DEC

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole has expressed his willingness to step down from his position, with the final decision resting with the party's high command. Speaking to reporters outside Vidhan Bhavan, Patole confirmed that the Congress's group leader in the state legislature would be elected today.

Following the Congress's dismal performance in the recent assembly elections, where it secured a mere 16 out of 288 seats, party sources indicated that Patole had requested to be relieved of his responsibilities. Despite earlier claims to the contrary, Patole clarified last week that he had not formally submitted his resignation, describing the speculation as unfounded.

Patole noted that the party's Maharashtra in-charge is set to arrive in the city this evening, and further discussions regarding the state chief's position will be held. When

Nana Patole *PHOTO: PTI*

pressed about his resignation, he reiterated, "I have expressed my willingness. The party high command will decide on the same."

In the recent assembly elections, the ruling Mahayuti coalition achieved a significant victory, winning 230 seats and retaining control of the state. In stark contrast, the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi coalition faced a severe setback, managing only 46 seats, further emphasising the challenges facing the Congress party in Maharashtra. *—PTI*

Maharashtra council chairperson elections on 19 Dec

Maharashtra legislative council chairperson will be elected on Thursday, deputy chairperson Neelam Gorhe said. Gorhe made this announcement in the legislative council on Tuesday the second day of the ongoing winter session of the state legislature. The council chairperson's post has been lying vacant since 7 July, 2022, after Ramraje Naik-term ended. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

DELHI POLLS DATE SOON, EC TO HOLD MEET

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Election Commission will review on Wednesday the preparedness of its poll machinery in Delhi where assembly elections are due early next year, sources said. Besides meeting officials of its local poll machinery, the EC will also interact with police and administration officials here, the sources said.

The Commission will also interact with representations of various political parties before it firms up a schedule for the polls. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Money laundering case: TN minister appears before ED

CHENNAI, 17 DEC

Tamil Nadu forest minister K Ponmudy on Tuesday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate here for questioning in a money laundering case investigation, official sources said. The minister's statement was recorded under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Central agency had in July attached assets worth more than Rs 14 crore in an alleged illegal mining-linked money laundering case against the 74-year-old minister, a DMK leader, his ex-MP son P Sigamani and some family members. The case is related to alleged illegal red earth mining stems from a state police FIR. *—PTI*

B'desh's law adviser slams PM's Victory Day post

DHAKA, 17 DEC

Asif Nazrul, the Law Adviser to Bangladesh's interim government, has expressed strong disapproval of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent X post commemorating Victory Day. The post credited Indian soldiers for their role in Bangladesh's liberation from Pakistan in 1971, prompting Nazrul to claim, "India was merely an ally in this victory, nothing more."

Victory Day, known locally as "Bijoy Dibosh," is celebrated annually on 16 December, marking the surrender of Pakistani forces to Indian troops, which led to Bangladesh's independence. In his post, Modi praised the courage and sacrifices of Indian soldiers, stating, "Their selfless dedication safeguarded our nation and brought glory to us."

Asif Nazrul *PHOTO: X*

Nazrul condemned the framing of the event, stating, "This was Bangladesh's Liberation War. It was for Bangladesh's independence against Pakistan. But Modi has claimed it was solely India's war... I see this as a threat to our independence, sovereignty and oneness."

Meanwhile, Senior BJP leader Arjun Singh met Bangladeshi lawyer Rabindra Ghosh, and felicitated him for his efforts in standing by the rights of minorities. *—PTI*

MP govt halts new registrations for Ladli Behna scheme

BHOPAL, 17 DEC

The Madhya Pradesh government's Ladli Behna scheme, which offers financial support to women, has paused new registrations since 20 August, 2023, as confirmed by Women and Child Development Minister Nirmala Bhuria.

In response to questions raised by Congress MLA Pratap Grewal during a state assembly session, Bhuria clarified that while financial assistance continues for existing beneficiaries, approximately 1.29 crore women registered under the scheme, no new enrolments are being accepted at this time.

Ladli Behna Yojana originally granted Rs 1,000 monthly to eligible women before the amount was increased to Rs 1,250 in October. *—PTI*

'ONLY TALKS BIG'

Cong does nothing for farmers: PM

JAIPUR, 17 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a scathing critique of the Congress party during the 'Ek Varsh-Parinaam Utkarsh' event, marking the Rajasthan government's first anniversary. Modi accused Congress of inaction regarding farmers' issues and claimed their history of delaying the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) is indicative of their motives.

The ERCP, aimed at transferring water to 13 under-resourced districts in eastern Rajasthan, has faced significant delays, which Modi alleged stem from Congress's reluctance to support agricultural initiatives. "They talk about farmers but do nothing for them," he stated.

PHOTO: PTI

In addition to discussing water disputes between states, Modi emphasised the BJP's approach of dialogue over discord. The Prime Minister asserted that their government has revitalised the ERCP and established an agreement for the Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal project, poised to benefit 21 districts in both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Modi highlighted the BJP's commitment to good governance, praising the accomplishments of the state government led by Bhajanlal Sharma. He lauded the party's recent successes in various elections and encouraged party supporters to prioritise water conservation efforts.

During the event, he symbolically mixed water from different rivers to advocate for river interlinking, asserting that Rajasthan possesses significant solar energy potential.

Attended by Rajasthan CM Bhajanlal Sharma and other prominent leaders, the event saw Modi inaugurate or lay the foundation for 24 development projects worth over Rs 46,300 crore, aimed at enhancing transport, energy, and water infrastructure in the state. *—PTI*

Badshah fined Rs 15K for driving on wrong side

GURUGRAM, 17 DEC

Gurugram Traffic Police has issued a challan of Rs 15,000 to popular rapper Badshah for driving on the wrong side of the road, playing loud music, and rash driving, officials said on Tuesday. The incident took place on 15 December when Badshah came to the Airia Mall on Sohana Road for a special appearance in a concert by Punjabi singer Karan Aujla, police said. Due to long traffic, the SUV, which was part of Badshah's convoy, drove on the wrong side of the road, catching the attention of some passersby who filmed the act. The traffic police issued a challan of Rs 15,000 to the rapper on Monday. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Pope Francis visit to India likely after 2025: Cardinal

KOCHI, 17 DEC

Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad on Tuesday said that Pope Francis's visit to India will most likely be after 2025, which has been announced as the "Jubilee Year" by the Catholic Church, due to celebrations in Rome that year. Fifty-one-year-old Koovakad was elevated to the rank of cardinal by Pope Francis on 7 December. On his arrival in Kerala on Tuesday, he thanked everyone who showed up to greet him at the Cochin International Airport here. He also said that he proudly recalls everyone's prayers, love and blessings for him. On being asked about the Pope's visit, he said that it was not clear when Pope Francis would come to India. "Chances are that it will be after 2025 which is the jubilee year. There are a lot of celebrations in Rome as it is the jubilee year and therefore, the Pope will most likely be there that year," he said. *—PTI*

Coimbatore blast mastermind Basha dies in hospital

COIMBATORE, 17 DEC

SA Basha, the mastermind of the 1998 serial bomb blasts that rocked Coimbatore, died due to age-related ailments at a private hospital here, police said on Tuesday. He died on 16 December evening. Police force has been deployed in the city in view of the proposed funeral procession of Basha on Tuesday evening, an official said. "He was on parole and not keeping well of late. He was admitted to a private hospital as his health deteriorated and died on Monday evening after being in prison for 35 years," said Indian National League party leader J Rahim. Basha, 84, and 16 others from Al-Umma had been serving life imprisonment in connection with the 1998 blasts. He is the founder-president of the banned outfit Al-Umma and planned the serial bomb blasts that claimed 58 lives on 14 February. As many as 231 people were injured in the blasts, police said. *—PTI*

Kerala HC rejects accused's plea in actress assault case

KOCHI, 17 DEC

Kerala High Court has rejected a plea by the prime accused in the 2017 actress assault case seeking recall of two witnesses examined during the trial, saying that it was "frivolous" application aimed at "delaying" the disposal of the matter. Justice C Jayachandran further said evidence sought to be adduced by recalling the two witnesses was "not essential for a just decision of the case" and dismissed the plea moved by prime accused Sunil NS also known as Pulsar Suni. One of the two witnesses was the doctor who collected the samples for forensic examination and the other was the Assistant Director of the Forensic Science Laboratory. *—PTI*

NCERT textbooks to cost less from 2025: Pradhan

Education Ministry to soon decide on NEET format

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks for some classes will cost less from next year, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced on Tuesday.

The Council, which currently prints 5 crore textbooks in a year, is working to augment the capacity to 15 crore from next year, he said.

The minister also informed that the new textbooks as per updated curriculum for classes 9-12 will be available from 2026-27 academic session.

"In the next academic year, NCERT will publish 15 crore quality and affordable books.... currently it publishes nearly 5 crore textbooks. Earlier there have been concerns about demand and supply issue about the textbooks, however, that will be addressed now," Pradhan told reporters.

NCERT, which currently prints 5 crore textbooks/year, is augmenting the capacity to 15 crore from next year, said Dharmendra Pradhan *PHOTO: PTI*

"The process is on and textbooks for classes 9-12 will be ready by 2026-27 academic session," he said.

NEET in online or pen and paper mode: Decision soon

The Education and Health Ministry are deliberating on whether to conduct medical entrance exam NEET-UG in pen and paper mode or online mode and a decision in this regard is expected soon.

The Education Ministry has held two rounds of talks with the Health Ministry led by Union Minister JP Nadda.

Currently, NEET-UG is conducted offline - in pen and paper mode - wherein students have to solve multiple choice questions on an OMR sheet.

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is the largest entrance exam in the country in terms of number of candidates appearing for the test. In 2024, a record over 24 lakh candidates took the exam. The Minister said a decision in this regard is expected soon and the reforms will be implemented in the 2025 edition of the exam.

"What will be NEET's methodology, what will be the protocol...a decision is expected soon. We will notify it soon," he added. The idea of switching to Computer Based Test (CBT) mode for NEET is not new and has been deliberated several times before. However, the push for the exam reforms came following the paper leak controversy earlier this year. *—PTI*

5TH INCIDENT IN 9 DAYS

Bomb threats continue to haunt Delhi schools

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

A few schools in Delhi received bomb threats on Tuesday, making it the second such incident this week and the fifth in nine days in the national capital, officials said.

On Monday, around 20 schools had received threat emails.

A Delhi Fire Service official said personnel from the fire department, local police, bomb detection team and dog squad conducted a search at Crescent Public School in Saraswati Vihar, northwest Delhi, after they received a bomb threat. However, nothing suspicious was found, he said.

Searches are going on at some more schools which also received similar threat emails, the official added.

On 14 December, eight schools received a similar email. *—PTI*

Explosion-like noise heard at police station

An explosion-like noise was heard at the Islamabad police station in Punjab's Amritsar in the early hours of Tuesday, causing panic. Police claimed that no blast occurred on the police station. They said an object fell on the temporary police sentry post outside the police station. Only the iron sheet on the top of the post was damaged, officials said. *—PTI*

ABVP PROTEST

Alleging discrimination by Jammu and Kashmir government against Hindi and Sanskrit in recruitment, ABVP students on Tuesday held a protest march, blocking Tawi bridge on the highway in Jammu *PHOTO: PTI*

Hanuman worship begins in reopened Sambhal temple

SAMBHAL, 17 DEC

Devotees thronged Khaggu Sarai in Sambhal on Tuesday to offer prayers to Lord Hanuman after an idol of the deity was discovered in Bhasma Shankar temple, which was reopened last week after remaining shut for 46 years.

Tuesday is dedicated to the worship of Lord Hanuman. "The temple was cleaned around 4am. A cholaa (cloth meant for gods and goddesses) was offered to Lord Hanuman and the Hanuman Chalisa recited," said the temple's priest, Shashikant Shukla.

Shukla said "shringaar (decoration)" of Lord Shiva was also performed in the temple's sanctum sanctorum.

The Shri Kartik Mahadev Temple (Bhasma Shankar temple) was reopened on 13 December after the authorities said they stumbled upon the covered structure during an anti-encroachment drive.

The temple housed an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivling.

Meanwhile, the owner of a house opposite the temple said he would remove the structure. *—PTI*

As Delhi AQI crosses 400, schools function in hybrid mode

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Delhi's air quality levels on Monday night breached the 400 mark, pushing the national capital once again into the 'severe' category, said the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Tuesday.

At 7am on Tuesday, Delhi's air quality index (AQI) was 421. The AQI values in areas including Anand Vihar, Ashok Vihar, Bawana, Jahangirpuri, and Alipur ranged 400–470, signifying hazardous air quality.

Meanwhile, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) classified the local air quality in the "Very Poor" category. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) reported the minimum temperature in Delhi as 5 degrees Celsius.

Bhagat Singh, a local resident, remarked, "Pollution has become an incurable disease, especially for Delhi. This is a problem every year. Only a government with willpower can resolve this issue."

The Sub-Committee of the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) implemented Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) across the National Capital Region (NCR) on Monday night with "immediate effect" after the AQI crossed into the severe zone at 401 by 10 PM.

Meanwhile, schools in Delhi-NCR on Tuesday switched to the hybrid mode of conducting classes because of the GRAP in force.

Classes for students in grades VI–IX and XI in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddh Nagar will operate in hybrid mode (physical and online), whereas students of class X and XII have to attend school in person. *—ANI*

At 7am on Tuesday, Delhi's air quality index (AQI) was 421 *PHOTO: ANI*

State to HC: We are maintaining communal harmony in Uttarkashi

NAINITAL, 17 DEC

Amid the ongoing dispute over a mosque in Uttarkashi, the state has submitted before the Uttarakhand High Court that communal harmony was being maintained in the town and any attempt to disturb it would be viewed strictly with necessary steps.

The state government's submission was made before a division bench of acting Chief Justice Manoj Kumar Tiwari and Justice Pankaj Purohit by additional government advocate JS Virk on 16 December, when a petition seeking protection of the mosque was again heard.

The High Court previously directed the district magistrate and the superintendent of police of Uttarkashi to maintain law and order in the vicinity of the mosque and keep the court apprised of the situation.

PHOTO: PTI

The disputed mosque is situated on Bhatwari Road.

Right wing outfits said the mosque was illegal whereas the petitioners claimed the contrary.

The petitioner Alpasankhyak Seva Samiti moved court in November, a few days ahead of a Mahapanchayat by right wing outfits, scheduled to be held on December 1 in protest against the mosque.

The petitioners in the meantime sought more time from the high court to produce documents to prove that the mosque belongs to Waqf/trust. *—PTI*

BIHAR HORROR

12-year-old girl raped, killed by her uncle

ARA, 17 DEC

A 12-year-old girl has been raped and beaten to death allegedly by her uncle in Bhojpur district, police said on Tuesday.

The accused has been arrested, a police officer said.

The girl had gone to her uncle's house to borrow something. The accused then sexually assaulted and killed her, the members of the victim's family claimed. They also told police that the accused had tied the girl's body to a cot after killing her.

When family members started looking for the girl, they went to the accused's house and found her body tied to a cot. By the time other residents of the locality also reached the spot, the SP said.

11-yr-old girl abducted, raped in Gujarat; one held

A labourer has been arrested for allegedly abducting an 11-year-old girl from near her house and raping her in an industrial area in Gujarat's Bharuch district on Monday, police said on Tuesday.

The police on Monday arrested the 36-year-old accused, a native of Jharkhand, for the assault that took place in the Jhagadia industrial area. The accused lived next to the girl's hut, DSP Kushal Oza told reporters. *—PTI*

COURT DENIES BAIL TO ELGAR CASE ACCUSED

MUMBAI, 17 DEC

A special NIA court here has denied interim bail to Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case accused activist Rona Wilson to attend his niece's wedding, saying the "relation is quite distant" and his presence there is not at all necessary.

Wilson was arrested in June 2018 following raids at his Delhi residence by the Pune police, which conducted a probe into the case before it was handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

He is currently in judicial custody and lodged at Taloja jail in Maharashtra's Navi Mumbai. The activist sought interim bail from 6 to 20 January, 2025 to attend the wedding ceremony of his niece. *—PTI*

CENTRE'S WARNING

OTT platforms told not to promote drugs

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

The government has cautioned OTT platforms of further regulatory scrutiny if they are found streaming content that inadvertently promotes, glamorises, or glorifies the use of drugs through the main protagonist and other actors without disclaimers or user warnings.

In an advisory to OTT platforms, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting said, "Such a portrayal has serious repercussions, particularly regarding the potential influence on young and impressionable viewers".

Citing the Code of Ethics for OTT platforms, the advisory asked them to exercise due diligence in content review and issue disclaimers or user warning while for any programming that contains depiction of drug use.

Centre's advisory asked OTT platforms to issue disclaimers or user warning for any programme that contains depiction of drug use *PHOTO: X*

"OTT platforms are requested to voluntarily conform to these guidelines in the larger public interest. Non-compliance may result in further regulatory scrutiny, especially in the light of the provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000 read with the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS), 1985," the advisory said.

The Code of Ethics for OTT platforms provides that a publisher shall not transmit, publish, or exhibit any content prohibited under any law for the time being in force or by any court of competent jurisdiction. The advisory has also been shared with the self-regulatory bodies of OTT platforms. *—PTI*

Lack of facilities: Woman delivers in ambulance

PALGHAR, 17 DEC

A 25-year-old woman with pregnancy complications delivered a baby in an ambulance with the help of a doctor onboard while being shifted from a rural hospital in Maharashtra's Palghar district to neighbouring Thane, officials said on Tuesday.

The Wada Rural Hospital lacks specialised facilities for managing such critical maternity cases, said medical superintendent Dr Yadav Shekhare. "Poor road conditions" further complicated the process of shifting the woman to a hospital in Thane for better care, he said.

Family members brought Kalyani Bhoye to the rural hospital in the early morning of 13 December, said Dr Shekhare. The doctor found signs of foetal distress and referred the woman to the Thane Civil Hospital, located 75 km away, for advanced treatment.

PHOTO: PTI

The woman was promptly ferried in a fully equipped ambulance with a doctor onboard. However, only 10km into the journey, poor road conditions and bumpy terrain triggered the need for the woman's delivery inside the ambulance, Dr Shekhare said.

Both the mother and son were out of danger. *—PTI*

LOVE CAN SPAN GREAT DISTANCES

Boris, a rescued tiger, travelled 200km over three years across Russia to reunite with his former mate, Svetlaya. The two tigers, orphaned in the Sikhote-Alin mountains in 2012, were raised together in a conservation programme with minimal human contact but at 18-months-old, they were released into the wild, 100 miles apart, to ensure their independence. Despite the distance, Boris's remarkable journey demonstrates the powerful bond between the pair, proving that love can indeed span great distances

PHOTO: @SUPRIYASAHUIAS

Lanka walks a tightrope between India & China

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu in New Delhi on Monday to bolster ties between the neighbouring countries.

Dissanayake said India's economic support is critical in realizing his vision of a prosperous Sri Lanka, as the island nation emerges from the worst economic crisis in its independent history.

"Our conversations focused on strengthening Indo-Sri Lanka economic cooperation, enhancing investment opportunities, fostering regional security, and advancing key sectors such as tourism and energy," Dissanayake, who is popularly known as AKD, said in a statement.

"These engagements reaffirm the commitment to deepening the partnership between our two nation

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake offers prayers at the Mahabodhi Temple, at Bodh Gaya, Bihar, on Tuesday ***HOTO: PTI***

New Delhi's support amid geopolitical tensions

Modi announced on Monday that India plans to supply liquefied natural gas to Sri Lanka's power plants and will work on connecting the power grids of the two countries.

Many analysts expect AKD's government to come under pressure amid growing geopolitical competition, especially as India and China vie for influence in the region.

Srikanth Kondapalli, an expert on China studies at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, said that Dissanayake's move to prioritize India as a strategic partner is influenced by their shared geographical proximity. India has long shared close political, cultural, economic and military ties to Sri Lanka.

"Unlike Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, who broke with the usual practice of making India the first destination in the neighborhood, AKD's strategy aligns with India's interests in promoting stability and democratic governance," Kondapalli told DW.

Sri Lanka's strategic shift

Earlier this month, Nepal's Oli, who was appointed prime minister in July, went on a four-day trip to Beijing to expand cooperation on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure plan that aims to smooth Chinese trade links with dozens of countries.

"This is also informed [by] the much-needed assistance of nearly $4 billion that India extended after Sri Lanka's meltdown in 2022 and the failure of China to bail out Colombo," he added, referring to the country's 2022 economic crisis.

Kondapalli noted that China's aggressive maritime activities and alleged predatory fishing operations in the Indian Ocean have raised concerns for Sri Lanka.

"The loss of Hambantota port for 99 years and extra-constitutional provisions on Colombo's port project to China has sapped Sri Lanka," said Kondapalli.

The port of Hambantota has been a Chinese-run facility since 2017, when Sri Lanka and China signed a 99-year lease after Colombo struggled to repay debt from the port's construction.

"Dissanayake is righting the wrongs done by his predecessors who provided unprecedented space for China and is resetting relations with India," Kondapalli added.

Relations with China under scrutiny

As Sri Lanka comes to terms with its economic realities and seeks to redefine its relationship with its influential neighbors, it faces critical decisions that will shape its economic future and sovereignty.

Dissanayake's visit to New Delhi is crucial for setting the tone of the island nation's foreign policy, especially considering his upcoming trip to China planned for early 2025.

"Sri Lanka has indeed decided to balance India and China and Dissanayake's government will be keen to show some gains while also appearing even-handed," Anil Wadhwa, a former Indian diplomat, told DW.

"The Chinese military presence will, however, continue to grow with the ships equipped with radars and sonography equipment now paying regular visits to Sri Lankan ports," he added.

Sri Lanka's balancing act between India and China

The strategic location of Sri Lanka along vital maritime routes makes it an essential asset for China as it seeks to secure its maritime interests and enhance its geopolitical leverage.

"On the other hand, allowing these visits for other ships, including Indian, gives them the leeway to avoid a confrontational situation," Wadhwa said.

"Playing off India and China could continue but nonetheless, the fact that Dissanayake's first official visit is to neighboring India is good optics and will help move the stalled issues forward."

It is still unclear how Dissanayake will navigate the India-China rivalry or if he will choose one over the other.

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, president of the Mantraya Institute of Strategic Studies, an independent research forum, noted that Sri Lanka is not trying to distance itself from China and rely solely on India for all its economic needs.

"It needs assistance from both countries and would like to cultivate both to fulfil its distinct needs. Assurance that Sri Lanka would not allow its territory to be used by China for anti-India activities would be the minimum requirement of New Delhi," D'Souza told DW.

"India would also need specifics about the steps Sri Lanka would take to prevent this. However, an aid-dependent Sri Lanka, already deep under the Chinese debt trap, may not be fully in control to assuage Indian concerns," she added. Recently, Dissanayake expressed his intention to boost ties with both China and India, and he made it clear that Sri Lanka's assets — including its land, sea and airspace — are not up for grabs.

This stance was evident when he opposed India's Adani Group gaining control over key economic sectors like Sri Lankan ports and renewable energy, citing environmental concerns.

"The fact that he is going to China after the India trip underscores how heavily China hangs in Dissanayake's vision and policy," said D'Souza.

"He could be seeking more relaxed and restructured loan repayment terms from Beijing. The fact also remains that Sri Lanka under Dissanayake is neither inclined nor in a position to look for an alternative to China." *—DW News*

SALAR

Delhi's air pollution is a human-made calamity

Delhi's air pollution is so bad that it's sometimes hard to discern anything more than a few metres in front of you. And it is affecting people's health. Breathing is uncomfortable, and one of us (Komali) developed rashes and red eyes on a recent trip to the city.

Our experiences are not unusual. Delhi – officially the National Capital Territory of Delhi – is the world's second most populated urban area, and is among its most polluted. Air pollution recently went 26 times over the healthy limit prescribed by the World Health Organization.

The air quality index, or AQI, is a measure of how polluted the air is on a scale of 0 (clean) to 500 (maximum pollution). On 19 November, Delhi's average was 485. Many of its air pollution sensors maxed out at 500, so the true figure would be even higher.

Things peak every winter when many people suffer from respiratory problems and hospital visits increase. An extraordinary 11.5 per cent of all deaths in the city can be attributed to air pollution, a loss of around 12,000 lives every year.

A human-made calamity

This is a human-made calamity with many causes. Some factors are common to many large and fast-growing cities, especially in emerging economies. Delhi has many coal power plants, for instance, and its streets are choked with heavy traffic. Decades of dust, often from the construction industry, have accumulated in and around the city. Waste is often simply burned.

But some factors are more specific and it is these that push Delhi from "regular pollution" into catastrophe. Every year, farmers across northern India especially the breadbasket states of Punjab and Haryana burn off unwanted straw left behind in fields, sending huge clouds of smoke downwind towards Delhi. Fireworks during Deepavali (held on 31 October this year) also cause a small but noticeable increase in air pollution.

> Farmers, for their part, must stop burning plant material left behind (known as stubble) after food is harvested. This is easier said than done. The areas upwind of Delhi tend to have two growing seasons, and many farmers burn off their rice stubble in November before planting wheat in the same field.

All this is exacerbated when winter begins and colder and more polluted air becomes trapped over the city by a layer of warmer air above it – a process known as temperature inversion.

A conscious effort

The risk of pollution is increasing. Central and state authorities blame each other and there is a lack of political will to address the problem. Individual people seem unwilling to take responsibility and stop polluting.

A conscious effort is needed. Fortunately, certain policies could make a difference. Materials should be covered at construction and demolition sites, for instance, to stop so much dust from being blown into the air. This may require Delhi to strengthen its legal enforcement system.

The city should plant more pavement trees and create new parks. Trees are good at combating air pollution. Waste burning should be restricted. Eventually, coal power will need to be replaced by wind and especially solar. When pollution is at its worst, the city can impose strict restrictions on large diesel-powered freight vehicles transporting non-essential items.

Farmers, for their part, must stop burning plant material left behind (known as stubble) after food is harvested. This is easier said than done. The areas upwind of Delhi tend to have two growing seasons, and many farmers burn off their rice stubble in November before planting wheat in the same field. The system has persisted for a long time and is effectively locked in, with most powerful actors not having enough incentive to change things.

There are some alternatives. Farmers could be encouraged to diversify their crops, perhaps through conditions attached to loans. Some of that stubble could instead be used as cattle feed, in compost, as a roof material, or burned in bioenergy plants to produce electricity.

Evidence-based strategies and best practices are crucial. The goal must be to reduce the air quality index to the "good" category of 0–50 and ultimately to eliminate toxic air in Delhi and the surrounding region.

—The Conversation.

Delhi is the world's second most populated urban area and is among its most polluted ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

A year of chaos, heartbreaks & setbacks for Indian wrestling

In an ideal world, politics and sport are not meant to be mixed. But then the world of Indian wrestling was far from ideal in 2024 with Vinesh Phogat's Olympic dejection and the never-ending administrative chaos pulling down a once flourishing sport.

From the time when Wrestling Federation of India elections were held, exactly a year back, to the recent National Championships in Benglauru, Indian wrestling has seemed like a rudderless ship.

Not too long ago, wrestling had developed into a sport that promised unprecedented Olympic success but cut to Paris 2024, Aman Sehrawat's bronze medal was what saved the delegation the blushes after Phogat's seemingly destined gold slipped through her grasp due to a cruel twist of fate.

She was, for better or for worse, the most intriguing story of Indian wrestling this year.

She punished herself to fight in a lower weight category after her preferred class was already booked for the Olympics, downed the then unbeaten Japanese legend Yui Susaki in her opening round in Paris and then ended up disqualified for being 100g overweight on the morning of the final.

A day later, she gave up on her sporting career, declaring that the fight had left her.

She wasn't done though. Following an emotionally overwhelming homecoming which included a custom-made gold medal from Haryana's khap panchayats, Phogat joined the Congress party, fought the state assembly elections and managed to become an MLA in her maiden electoral outing from Julana constituency.

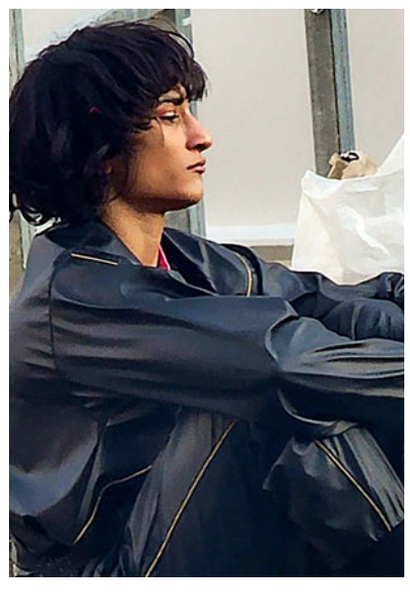
She wasn't the only one in her fraternity who decided on politics as future.

Bajrang Punia too joined the Congress but he did not get the same returns as Phogat.

His position was that of a Kisan morcha head and his wrestling career was left stalled after coping a four-year ban for failure to submit dope samples during training camps. This was after he failed to qualify for Paris, a new low in the career of the celebrated grappler, who fetched a bronze in the Tokyo Games.

The two maintained all along that their fight against alleged sexual harassment of women wrestlers by former WFI head Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh was an apolitical one.

But their fellow protestor and Rio Olympics bronze-winner Sakshi Malik sought to dispute that soon after they joined congress.She went on to allege in her book that the the duo's "greed" punctured their protest against Sharan Singh.



Vinesh Phogat fought in a lower weight category after her preferred class was already for the Olympics, downed the then unbeaten Japanese legend Yui Susaki in her opening round in Paris and then ended up disqualified for being 100g overweight on the morning of the final ***PHOTOS: PTI/ANI***

Next generation affected by chaos

The likes of Anshu Malik and Antim Panghal, who were touted as the next big thing in Indian wrestling, cut a sorry figure in Paris but Aman carried forward the rich legacy of the Chhatrasal stadium by winning the men's freestyle 57kg bronze.

It was a category which 2020 Tokyo Games silver-medallist Ravi Dahiya made his own. But Dahiya vanished from the scene due to spate of injuries that affected his form.

The Tokyo campaign, which yielded two medals in wrestling, should have been the catalyst for better infrastructure and coaching for Indian wrestler.

However, the developments in the last 24 months have prevented growth.

The potential is still there and the biggest example was Indian U17 women team's world championship victory in Amman, Jordan in September. The country had been aiming for a podium finish for long and the dream finally materialised this year. Out of 10 possible medals, India won eight medals, including five gold medal and one silver.

Finishing ahead of powerhouse Japan and impressive Kazakhstan is no mean feat.

However, the unending litigations have tied the hands of WFI which is now struggling to carry out day to day affairs of the body.

The team led by Sanjay Singh, that won the elections, stands suspended by the Sports Ministry.

The ground of suspension is announcing Nationals without following a 15-day notice period in December 2023.

But the fact remains that if WFI had followed the notice period, wrestlers would have lost a crucial year because by the time the 15-day period would have completed, year 2024 would have started.

WFI was forced to withdraw the team from the senior World Championship owing to pending litigation by Sakshi and and her wrestler husband Satyawart Kadian. Eventually after government's intervention a team was finally sent. No proper coaching camp has been organised in the last two years, the efforts to revive the Pro Wrestling League are on hold, grants and sponsorships have stopped, no foreign/personal coaches have been engaged and there is no planning to take the sport forward. If the situation could be summed up in a line, Indian wrestling is stagnant for now. *—PTI*

PHOTO: XXX

2 cops killed in Pakistan terror attack

PESHAWAR, 17 DEC

Terrorists hurled grenades at a police check-post in Pakistan's restive northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Tuesday, killing at least two policemen and injuring three, police said. The terror attack took place in the Chakesar area in the mountainous Shangla district. The terrorist threw the hand grenade and opened fire on the check-post before fleeing the scene, officials said. The injured police officers were immediately transported to a hospital in Battagram. However, no one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Terrorist attacks have been rampant in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The third quarter of 2024 saw an increase in fatalities of terrorist violence and counter-terrorism campaigns, with a 90 per cent surge in violence. *—PTI*

China executes official in largest corruption case

BEIJING, 17 DEC

China on Tuesday executed Li Jianping, a former official in the north Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, who was convicted in the largest-ever corruption case in the country totalling to over USD 421 million. The death sentence of Li, former secretary of the ruling Communist Party working committee of the Hohhot economic and technological development zone, was initially issued in September 2022 and upheld on appeal in August 2024. Tuesday's execution followed the approval of the Supreme People's Court and was carried out by a court in Inner Mongolia, Xinhua news agency reported. Li, 64 was found guilty by an intermediate court earlier of embezzling a staggering three billion yuan in illegal gains the largest sum involved in a single corruption case in China's history. *—PTI*

Aus proposes ban on protests at places of worship

MELBOURNE, 17 DEC

An Australian state government on Tuesday proposed new restrictions on protesters in response to rising antisemitism, including a ban on demonstrations outside places of worship. Victoria Premier Jacinta Allan proposed the laws after arsonists damaged a Melbourne synagogue this month and protestors kept fearful worshippers trapped inside a Sydney synagogue for three hours a week earlier. "That's not peaceful protest. It's menacing behaviour," Allan said. "Antisemitism is a cancer and we must leave no stone unturned to fight the evil of antisemitism, to fight the evil of this racism in all of its forms and also to continue to work to help heal our multicultural community" she added. *—PTI*

Pakistan says it has not blocked any VPNs

ISLAMABAD, 17 DEC

Pakistan's telecom watchdog made it clear that no virtual private network (VPNs) was blocked in the country, nor it planned to do so in the future despite having the capability. It was announced by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) chairman Hafizur Rehman on Monday while addressing the launch of the regulator's 'Annual Report'. The statement comes after news taking rounds for months that the regulator had initiated the process of registering the VPNs. The deadline for the registration was extended beyond 30 November. However, a new deadline had not been announced for the VPN suspension. The government had expressed the apprehension that VPN use might be harmful for the people, while accessing immoral contents on social media or other internet platforms. *—PTI*

Explosion kills head of Russia's nuclear defence forces

Ukraine official says secret service behind it

MOSCOW, 17 DEC

A senior Russian general was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security service levelled criminal charges against him. A Ukrainian official said the service carried out the attack.

Lt Gen Igor Kirillov, the Chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed as he left for his office. Kirillov's assistant also died in the attack.

Kirillov, 54, was under sanctions from several countries, including the UK and Canada, for his actions in Moscow's war in Ukraine. On Monday, Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, opened a criminal investigation against him, accusing him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons.

An official with the SBU said the agency was behind the attack. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to release the information, described Kirillov as a "war criminal and an entirely legitimate target."

The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since its full-scale invasion in February 2022. In May, the US State Department said that it had recorded the use of chloropicrin, a poison gas first deployed in World War I, against Ukrainian troops.

Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and, in turn, has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat.

Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations.

He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances — claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda. *—PTI*

Investigators work at the place where Lt. General Igor Kirillov was killed by an explosive device in Moscow, Russia **PHOTO: PTI**

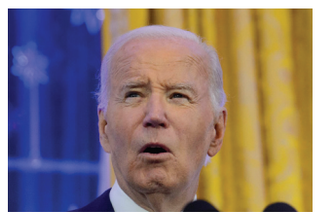


PHOTO: PTI

'Biden stupid for allowing Ukraine use US weapons'

PALM BEACH, 17 DEC

President-elect Donald Trump on Monday suggested that he may reverse President Joe Biden's recent decision to allow Ukrainian forces to use American long-range weapons to strike deeper into Russian territory.

Trump called the decision made by Biden last month "stupid." He also expressed anger that his incoming administration was not consulted before Biden made the move. With the loosening of the restrictions, Biden gave Ukraine long-sought permission to use the Army Tactical Missile System provided by the US to strike Russian positions hundreds miles from its border.

"Why would they do that without asking me what I thought? I wouldn't have had him do that. I think it was a big mistake," he said. The White House pushed back on Trump's criticism, noting that the decision was made after months of deliberations that started before last month's election. *—PTI*

Judge bins Trump's bid to dismiss hush money conviction

NEW YORK, 17 DEC

A judge Monday rejected President-elect Donald Trump's bid to have his hush money conviction dismissed because of the US Supreme Court's recent ruling on presidential immunity. But the case's overall future remains unclear.

Manhattan Judge Juan M Merchan's decision eliminates one potential off-ramp from the case ahead of Trump's return to office next month. His lawyers have raised other arguments for dismissal, however.

A jury convicted Trump in May of 34 counts of falsifying business records related to a USD 1,30,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels in 2016. Trump denies wrongdoing.

The allegations involved a scheme to hide the payout to Daniels during the final days of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign to keep her from publicising — and keep voters from hearing — her claim of a sexual encounter with the married then-businessman years earlier. He says nothing sexual happened between them.

A month after the verdict, the Supreme Court ruled that ex-presidents can't be prosecuted for official acts — things they did in the course of running the country — and that prosecutors can't cite those actions to bolster a case centred on purely personal, unofficial conduct.

In Monday's ruling, Merchan denied the bulk of Trump's claims that some of prosecutors' evidence related to official acts and implicated immunity protections.

The judge said that even if he found that some evidence related to official conduct, he'd still find that prosecutors' decision to use "these acts as evidence of the decidedly personal acts of falsifying business records poses no danger of intrusion on the authority and function of the Executive Branch." *—PTI*

Donald Trump **PHOTO: PTI**

- A jury convicted Trump in May of 34 counts of falsifying business records related to a USD 1,30,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels in 2016. Trump denies wrongdoing.

TikTok asks US SC to block govt ban

WASHINGTON, 17 DEC

TikTok has urgently requested the US Supreme Court to intervene and block a federal law that mandates the ban of the widely-used platform unless its Chinese parent company, ByteDance, agrees to sell it. The legal appeal comes ahead of a looming deadline of 19 January.

Lawyers for TikTok argued that a month-long shutdown could lead to a loss of one-third of its daily users in the US, alongside significant drops in advertising revenue. Content creators dependent on the platform for their livelihoods are also expected to join the plea, which raises questions concerning free speech rights versus national security concerns.

Chief Justice John Roberts will initially consider the request, likely consulting all nine justices. This follows a panel of federal judges from the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit who recently denied an emergency plea to block the law, ruling it compatible with the First Amendment. *—PTI*

GIRL SHOOTS TEACHER, TEEN TO DEATH AT WISCONSIN SCHOOL

MADISON, 17 DEC

A 15-year-old student opened fire in a study hall at Abundant Life Christian School in Wisconsin on Monday, resulting in the deaths of a teacher and another teenager, and leaving six others injured. The incident prompted a swift response from police following a second grader's 999 call.

Police Chief Shon Barnes reported that two students are in critical condition, while three others were taken to hospital with less severe injuries; two have since been released. The shooter, identified as Natalie Rupnow, was found with a self-inflicted gunshot wound and died en route to hospital.

Barbara Wiers, the school's director, revealed that the lockdown announcement was believed to be a drill, unlike previous safety practices. *—PTI*

Israel and Hamas move closer to ceasefire deal after setbacks

Destroyed Syrian naval vessels from previous Israeli airstrikes are seen in the port of Latakia, Syria **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW YORK, 17 DEC

After months of stalemate, Israel and Hamas are reportedly edging towards a ceasefire to end their 14-month war. Mediators from the US., Qatar, and Egypt have recently intensified their efforts, noting a growing willingness from both parties to conclude a deal. In a significant shift, Hamas has indicated increased "flexibility" regarding the timing of an Israeli troop withdrawal from Gaza. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz stated on Monday that a resolution is closer than ever.

Despite lingering uncertainties, officials are expressing cautious optimism about the negotiations. This shift in sentiment may stem from Israel's considerable military pressure on Hamas, increased isolation of the militant group following Hezbollah's ceasefire, and setbacks faced by Iran, a critical supporter of both factions.

Both the outgoing Biden administration and incoming President-elect Donald Trump are advocating for a swift resolution ahead of the 20 January inauguration. The emerging agreement would unfold in phases, starting with a ceasefire, the exchange of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners, and a boost in humanitarian aid to Gaza. It is estimated that around 90 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have been displaced during the conflict. *—PTI*

US airstrike targets Houthi military sites

The US military has conducted an airstrike on a Houthi military facility in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, marking another attack on the Iranian-backed rebels. The Houthis reported that the strike hit a segment of the extensive complex housing their Defence Ministry, although there were no immediate reports of casualties. US Central Command stated that the late Monday strike aimed at a critical command and control facility that served as a hub for coordinating Houthi operations. These operations reportedly include attacks on US Navy and merchant vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

Kweon Seong-dong, center, speaks during a party's meeting at the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Battle erupts over court's ruling on Yoon

SEOUL, 17 DEC

South Korea's acting leader, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, pledged to reassure the global community that stability is being restored after Parliament impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his brief martial law declaration on 3 December. Yoon's powers have been suspended pending a ruling from the Constitutional Court, which could lead to a national election within two months if he is ousted.

With Parliament led by the liberal opposition Democratic Party, Han emphasised his commitment to stabilising the economy and maintaining international confidence. However, political tensions escalate as rival factions argue over filling three vacant seats within the nine-member Constitutional Court, which will determine Yoon's fate. To remove Yoon from office, at least six justices must agree, but with three positions unfilled, a unanimous decision in favour of impeachment is now crucial. The ongoing dispute has revealed deep divisions, with accusations from the Democratic Party that the ruling People Power Party is attempting to impede the impeachment process. The legitimacy of Han's authority to appoint justices remains contested, as experts suggest he has the right to proceed with nominations, diverging opinions on his power as president. *—PTI*

POPE REVEALS BOMBING PLOT DURING IRAQ VISIT

ROME, 17 DEC

Pope Francis turned 88 on Tuesday and marked the occasion with revelations that he almost didn't make it. According to excerpts of his upcoming autobiography, suicide bombers had planned to attack him during his 2021 visit to Iraq, but were killed before striking.

Italian daily Corriere della Sera on Tuesday ran excerpts of 'Hope: The Autobiography', written with Italian author Carlo Musso, which is being released in more than 80 countries next month. The New York Times ran other excerpts Tuesday, Francis' 88th birthday.

In the Italian excerpts, Francis recalled his historic March 2021 trip to Iraq, the first ever by a pope.

According to the book, British intelligence informed Iraqi police as soon as Francis arrived in Baghdad that a woman wearing explosives was heading toward Mosul and was planning to blow herself up during the papal visit. "And that a truck was heading there fast with the same intention," Francis says in the book.

The visit went ahead as planned, albeit under tight security, and became one of the most poignant of all of Francis' foreign trips. *—PTI*

FROM 1 JAN

SL slashes security to ex-prezs, saves ₹1,000M

COLOMBO, 17 DEC

The Sri Lankan government announced on Tuesday that it will save Rs 1,200 million annually by reducing the excessive personal security provided to former presidents, effective from 1 January. Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala stated that the decision aligns with the government's policy to ensure security for all citizens, rather than favouring those in high public positions.

"We are committed to treating those in power the same as ordinary citizens. We aim to end the culture of large VIP convoys disregarding traffic regulations," Wijepala remarked. In 2024, Rs 1,448 million was allocated for the security of former presidents, a considerable financial burden on the country during challenging times.

Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's security costs were the highest, amounting to Rs 710 million for over 310 personnel **PHOTO: PTI**

Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's security costs were the highest, amounting to Rs 710 million for over 310 personnel. Wijepala clarified that the decision was not aimed specifically at Rajapaksa, but based on comprehensive threat assessments of all six former presidents' security needs. Under the new arrangements, each former president will be allocated only 60 police personnel.

The opposition Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), led by Rajapaksa, condemned the decision as a politically motivated act of revenge, highlighting ongoing threats from remnants of the LTTE. Rajapaksa is credited with defeating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who had engaged in a nearly 30-year campaign for an independent Tamil homeland, culminating in their defeat in 2009. *—PTI*

7.3 earthquake hits Pacific island nation of Vanuatu

WELLINGTON, 17 DEC

A magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck Tuesday just off the coast of Vanuatu in the South Pacific Ocean, the USGS said.

The quake occurred at a depth of 57 km and was centred 30 km west of Port Vila, the largest city in the island nation. The jolt was followed by a magnitude 5.5 aftershock near the same location.

It was not immediately clear whether it caused any damage, but Vanuatu government websites were offline in the aftermath of the quake and phone numbers for the police and other public agencies did not connect. Social media channels for the country's geohazards agency and the prime minister's office have not been updated. A video posted on social media appeared to show a building that houses some diplomatic missions to Vanuatu — including those of Britain, France and New Zealand — with some damage to their structure, including buckled windows and debris that had crumbled from walls to the ground. The USGS warned of tsunami waves for some coasts on Vanuatu, a group of 80 islands that is home to about 330,000 people.

The USGS also warned of tsunami waves registering less than 0.3 meters (1 foot) above the tide level for Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Solomon Islands. *—PTI*

Sensex down 1,064 pts; sinks below 81K

It was weighed down by across-the-board selloff ahead of US Fed interest rate decision

MUMBAI, 17 DEC

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slumped over 1 per cent on Tuesday, weighed down by an across-the-board selloff amid cautious investors approach ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision.

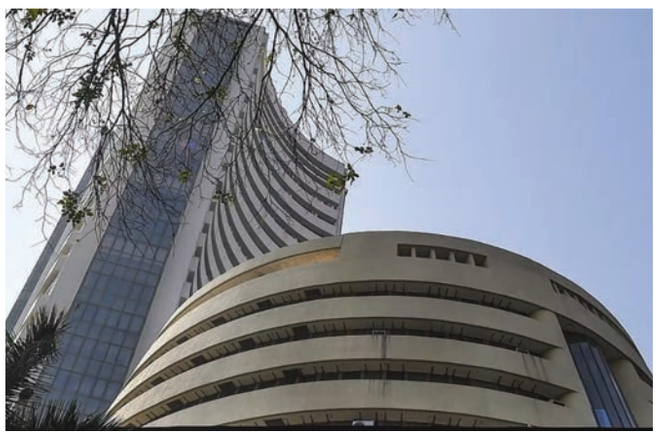
Falling for the second day in a row, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,064.12 points or 1.30 per cent to settle at 80,684.45. During the day, it slumped 1,136.37 points or 1.39 per cent to 80,612.20.

The NSE Nifty tumbled 332.25 points or 1.35 per cent to 24,336.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, all firms ended in the red. Bharti Airtel, IndusInd Bank, JSW Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, Asian Paints, Larsen & Toubro, Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank were the biggest laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were mostly trading in negative territory. Wall Street ended mostly higher on Monday.



Bharti Airtel, IndusInd Bank, JSW Steel, Tata Consultancy, Asian Paints, Larsen & Toubro, & Reliance were among biggest laggards **PHOTO: X**

"Concurrently, the rupee has depreciated to an all-time low, and a record-high trade deficit is exacerbating the pressure," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 278.70 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.50 per cent to USD 73.58 a barrel.

- The NSE Nifty tumbled 332.25 points or 1.35 per cent to 24,336

The 30-share gauge declined 384.55 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 81,748.57 on Monday. Nifty lost 100.05 points or 0.40 per cent to 24,668.25. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Gold snaps 2-day losing streak; US Fed policy in focus

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Gold prices bounced back on Tuesday, rising Rs 950 to Rs 79,300 per 10 grams in the national capital, as jewellers made fresh buying at prevailing levels to meet the wedding season demand, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Besides, the US Federal Reserve, which starts its two-day monetary policy meeting on Tuesday, is expected to announce its interest rate decision, which could have an impact on the overall gold performance next year. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity ended at Rs 78,350 per 10 grams on Monday. *—PTI*

Garment exports rise 11.4% despite global uncertainties

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

India's readymade garment exports rose 11.4 per cent to USD 9.85 billion during April-November this fiscal despite global uncertainties, signalling robust global demand for Made-in-India products, AEPC said on Tuesday. The Apparel Exports Promotion Council (AEPC) said that with the changing geopolitical equations, a lot more business will shift to India in the near future. The growth also reflects the growing trust of global brands for Made-in-India products, especially considering the uptick in the festive season demand. The chairman appealed to international buyers to visit India and participate in Bharat Tex Expo 2025, a big platform to see India's entire textiles value chain under one roof. *—PTI*

Magicpin enters into food delivery with 3,000+ deals

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Hyper-local e-commerce firm magicpin has forayed into quick commerce for food delivery with the launch of its magicNow brand that will work for over 2,000 food brands and 1,000 merchants to start with, the company said on Tuesday. Unlike other quick commerce players, magicpin will not operate via dark stores for food delivery, the company said in a statement. magicNOW will leverage the service of magicpin's logistic aggregator vertical -- Velocity. magicpin is currently offering Velocity to multiple brands including KFC, Burger King, IGP gifting etc.

New Delhi, 17 DEC
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Kalapataru Projects Int'l raises Rs 1,000 cr via QIP

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Kalpataru Projects International Ltd (KPIL) has raised about Rs 1,000 crore through issuance 83.26 lakh equity shares at Rs 1,201 per piece on qualified institutions placement (QIP) basis. Pursuant to the allotment of equity shares in the issue, the paid-up equity share capital of the company increased from Rs 32,48,92,304 to Rs 34,15,45,092, the company said in a regulatory filing. According to the filing, the QIP Committee at its meeting held on Tuesday approved the issue and allotment of 83,26,394 equity shares to eligible qualified institutional buyers at the issue price of Rs 1,201 per equity share aggregating to Rs 9,99,99,99,194, pursuant to the Issue. *—PTI*

Rupee settles on flat note, up 1P at 84.90

Mumbai, 17 DEC

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day higher by 1 paisa at 84.90 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, weighed down by disappointing trade balance data and weak domestic markets. Forex traders said the rupee is likely to remain under pressure due to concerns over slowdown in the economy and dollar demand from importers. At interbank foreign exchange, rupee opened at 84.89 and touched an all-time low of 84.93. *—PTI*

Asian shares decline after Nasdaq sets record

BANGKOK, 17 DEC

Shares fell in Asia on Tuesday after the Nasdaq set a record ahead of a meeting by the Federal Reserve later this week that could set the direction for markets in the new year.

US futures slipped and oil prices reversed early losses.

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 index lost 0.2 per cent to 39,364.68, helped by gains in technology shares including SoftBank Group Corp., whose CEO Masayoshi Son joined President-elect Donald Trump in announcing plans Monday by the Japanese technology and telecoms giant to invest $100 billion in US projects over the next four years.

Chinese markets slid further, with Hong Kong's Hang Seng index losing 0.1% to 19,773.60. The Shanghai Composite index shed 0.7% to 3,361.49.

PHOTO: X

South Korea's Kospi sank 1.3 per cent to 2,456.81 as authorities were pushing to summon impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol for questioning over his short-lived martial law decree of last week.

On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve will announce its last move on interest rates for the year. The widespread expectation is that it will cut its main rate for a third straight time, as it tries to boost the slowing job market after getting inflation nearly all the way down to its target of 2%.

Bitcoin's price has catapulted from roughly $44,000 at the start of the year on expectations that Trump will favour digital currencies. *—PTI*

Post-demerger, ITC will retain a 40 per cent stake in ITC Hotels, while the remaining 60 per cent will be distributed to ITC shareholders **PHOTO: X**

ITC sets 1 Jan as effective date for demerger

KOLKATA, 17 DEC

Conglomerate Company ITC Ltd has announced 1 January, 2025, as the effective date for the demerger of its hotel business, following approval from the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Kolkata. The company informed shareholders on Tuesday that it received a certified copy of the NCLT's order, dated 4 October, 2024, sanctioning the demerger under Sections 230-232 of the Companies Act, 2013. The order was received by ITC on 16 December. The company's stock opened in red but quickly recovered during morning trade, currently trading 0.69 per cent higher at Rs 473.35 apiece on the NSE on 17 December, 2024.

ITC had first announced plans to demerge its hotel vertical in August 2023. The shareholders overwhelmingly approved the move in June 2024, with only 0.4 per cent opposing the proposal. However, proxy advisory firm Institutional Investor Advisory Services (IiAS) had advised shareholders to vote against the demerger, arguing it would unlock only partial value. ITC defended the decision, emphasizing the hotel arm's growth and readiness to operate independently.

Post-demerger, ITC will retain a 40 per cent stake in ITC Hotels, while the remaining 60 per cent will be distributed to ITC shareholders in proportion to their holdings. *—Agencies*

SEBI'S new platform to track inactive MF folios

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

India's markets regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), has proposed the establishment of a service platform aimed at helping investors locate inactive and unclaimed mutual fund (MF) folios. Named the Mutual Fund Investment Tracing and Retrieval Assistant (MITR), this platform will be developed by the Registrar and Transfer Agents.

The initiative is designed to encourage investors to search for forgotten MF investments, update their Know Your Customer (KYC) details, and implement safeguards against fraudulent redemptions. The proposed platform is expected to reduce the number of unclaimed mutual fund folios and enhance transparency within the financial ecosystem.

SEBI noted that many investors often lose track of their investments, particularly those made in physical form with minimal KYC details. *—PTI*

Food deliveries boost job mkt: Nitin Gadkari

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari emphasised the significance of the food delivery economy in India, noting its potential to create vast employment opportunities.

Speaking at Zomato's conference on 'Sustainability and Inclusivity: Role of the Platform Economy', Gadkari revealed that the current workforce of 7.7 million delivery workers could rise to 25 million by 2030.

"Creating jobs for 25 million youths is a monumental achievement for our country," he stated, underlining the government's commitment to employment generation.

The minister commended Zomato for facilitating job opportunities for many young individuals, but also raised concerns regarding road safety for delivery workers. *—PTI*

India doubles RE capacity, aims to be global leader: Joshi

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

India's renewable energy capacity addition nearly doubled to 15 GW from April to November this fiscal, positioning the country to become a global leader in clean energy, according to Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy, Pralhad Joshi. Speaking at the CII International Energy Conference & Exhibition 2024, he highlighted that the installed capacity of non-fossil fuel sources has grown to 214 GW—a 14 per cent increase from the previous year.

Joshi attributed this success to the government's commitment to achieving 500 GW of non-fossil energy by 2030, stating, "This transformation is not just a dream; it is happening today." Last month alone saw an impressive addition of 2.3 GW, marking a fourfold increase from November 2023.

The minister pointed out significant foreign direct investment, amounting to USD 6.1 billion over the past three years, and announced a production-linked incentive scheme worth Rs 24,000 crore to boost domestic solar panel manufacturing.

The PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana aims to enhance household solar energy production, targeting one million installations by 2026-27. Joshi also shared insights on the National Green Hydrogen Mission, revealing substantial support for both electrolyser manufacturing and green hydrogen production.

CII leaders underscored the importance of enhancing transmission infrastructure and the role of bioenergy in achieving net-zero goals, reiterating industry readiness to collaborate with the government on these initiatives. *—PTI*

Union Minister for New & Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi **PHOTO: X**

TO INTIMATE TAXPAYERS

CBDT launches campaign on ITR, AIS mismatch awareness

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

The income tax department on Tuesday said it is sending SMS and emails to taxpayers and non-filers where it has identified mismatch between transactions reported in Annual Information Statement (AIS) and income disclosed in ITRs for the financial years 2023-24 and 2021-22.

In a statement, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said it has launched an electronic campaign to assist taxpayers in resolving mismatches between the income and transactions reported in the AIS and those disclosed in Income Tax Returns (ITRs) for the financial years 2023-24 and 2021-22.

This campaign also targets individuals who have taxable income or significant high-value transactions reported in their AIS but have not filed ITRs for the respective years.

The initiative is part of the implementation of the e-Verification Scheme, 2021.

As part of this campaign, informational messages have been sent via SMS and email to taxpayers and non-filers where mismatches have been identified between transactions reported in AIS and ITRs filed.

The CBDT said that the purpose of this campaign is to remind and guide individuals who may not have fully disclosed their income in their ITRs to take this opportunity to file revised or belated ITRs for FY 2023-24, the last date of which is December 31.

Taxpayers can also provide their feedback, including disagreeing with the information reported in the AIS, through the AIS portal accessible via the e-filing website. *—PTI*

'SECURITY GAPS IMPEDE AI GROWTH IN INDIA'

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

As many as 92 per cent of Indian executives view security vulnerabilities as the foremost challenge to responsible AI adoption, highlighting a pressing need for robust governance frameworks to foster trust and mitigate risks in an increasingly AI-driven landscape, according to Deloitte.

The 'AI at a crossroads: Building trust as the path to scale' report by Deloitte Asia Pacific, which surveyed 900 senior leaders across 13 markets revealed that while enthusiasm for AI is high, significant barriers remain.

Urgency for effective AI governance is further underscored by the alarming statistic that over half of technology workers do not believe their workplaces are equipped. *—PTI*

TO RIVAL APPLE & MICROSOFT

Musk drops hints to launch 'XMail'; taunts Gmail

Tech billionaire Elon Musk has hinted the launch of 'XMail' — a potential email alternative to Gmail and a direct rival Apple Mail, and Microsoft Outlook. The announcement came via a brief post on Musk's social media platform, X (formerly Twitter), where he hinted at the possibility of a "simpler" email service that aligns with his vision for an all-encompassing app.

Musk's cryptic post immediately sparked curiosity and debate online. While some users welcomed the idea of a streamlined email experience, others expressed skepticism, questioning whether XMail would offer anything revolutionary compared to established services like Gmail and Outlook.

"It's about time email got a proper overhaul. Looking forward to this," one user commented, reflecting growing frustrations with existing email platforms. Others, however, joked about potential issues, citing Musk's track record with ambitious promises and X's recent challenges with user experience.

The concept of XMail comes as Musk continues to expand X's functionality, positioning it as a 'super app' that integrates messaging, payments, video, and more.

The move aligns with his broader goal of transforming X into an all-in-one digital ecosystem akin to China's WeChat.

While details about XMail remain scarce, the announcement has already generated significant buzz.

Whether Musk's latest venture will disrupt the email space or fade as another lofty idea remains to be seen.

For now, the internet remains divided, with reactions ranging from excitement to playful skepticism.

Social media reactions have been mixed, with some users excited about the prospect of a simpler, Musk-led email service, while others remain wary of its feasi

bility. "If XMail can reduce spam and simplify email, it could be a game-changer," a user commented, reflecting the widespread frustration with current platforms. *—PTI*

Elon Musk **PHOTO: X**

Tata Steel starts all-women shift at J'khand iron mine

JAMSHEDPUR, 17 DEC

Tata Steel has launched an all-women shift at its Noamundi iron mine in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district, marking a pioneering step in India's mining sector. The announcement was made in a company statement, highlighting that women employees undertook all mining activities during the shift, including operating heavy earth-moving machinery and overseeing operations.

The initiative, flagged off by Mines Safety Deputy Director General Shyam Sundar Prasad, underscores Tata Steel's commitment to fostering an equitable workplace and empowering women in a traditionally male-dominated industry. Prasad acknowledged the government's support in promoting progressive workplaces, citing the 2019 decision by the Director General of Mines Safety that allowed women to work in all shifts.

DB Sundara Ramam, Tata Steel's vice president for raw materials, described the all-women shift as a landmark achievement not only for the company but for the entire Indian mining sector.

Tata Steel's journey began with "Women@Mines" initiative in 2019, recruiting and training women from local communities for various roles. Following extensive training, 24 female operators, from 2,100 applicants, joined workforce in 2022. *—PTI*

BGT: Rahul, Jadeja lead India's fightback on Day 4

Bumrah and Akash, who showed appreciable gumption, are holding the fort for India against Aus

BRISBANE, 17 DEC

KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja were determination personified as their fighting fifties helped India avoid the follow-on on the fourth day of the weather-hit third Test against a menacing Australia that seems meandering towards a draw.

Jadeja (77, 123b, 7x4, 1x6) and Rahul (84, 139, 8x4) were the heavy-lifters in India's 252 for nine when bad light forced a early close to the day.

Jasprit Bumrah (10) and Akash Deep (27), who showed appreciable gumption, are holding the fort for India.

The visitors trail Aussies by 193 runs. But they wouldn't mind that one bit as Australia will now have to bat again and forcing a result in three sessions looks an improbable target, considering the Brisbane weather pattern.

The city is bracing up for rain and a thunderstorm or two on Wednesday.

A quick word of appreciation is also required for No. 10 Bumrah and No. 11 Akash Deep for knocking down the 33 runs required to go past the follow-on mark of 246.

India's Ravindra Jadeja, left, fist bumps with batting partner Nitish Kumar Reddy PHOTO: PTI

The much-awaited moment came when Akash crunched Pat Cummins over gully for a boundary.

When these two joined forces, India were reeling at 213 for 9 after Jadeja was dismissed off a Cummins' snorter.

But while resuming from a wafer-thin overnight score of 51 for four, India needed someone to offer fight, and Rahul, India's standout batter in this series so far, did precisely that.

Rahul displayed admirable technical nous to withstand the stern test posed by the Australian bowlers to take the game deep into the day.

A nine toes down Rahul and an equally feisty Jadeja added 67 runs for the sixth wicket, and it was the first sign of India's fight.

The Aussies employed three slips and a gully, leaving the vast expanse of the ground to play his favourite shot -- drive through the cover or in front of the point.

Australia assistant coach Daniel Vettori admitted that a resilient partnership between Indian tailenders Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep foiled their plans to enforce a follow-on, while also defending the decision not to declare the home team's first innings in the third Test which seems heading towards a draw.

Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood is likely to miss the remainder of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India due to a right calf strain that he sustained during the ongoing third Test at the Gabba, Cricket Australia said on Tuesday. —*PTI*

Rahul's defence method: Tighten up, attack later

BRISBANE, 17 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

Tightening up defence and giving bowlers respect in the first 30 overs of an innings has been the mantra to KL Rahul's success during the ongoing series against Australia in which his other India teammates have struggled.

Rahul has by far looked the most assured Indian batter on the tour and it was on display once again on Tuesday when he produced a gritty 84 off 139 balls in challenging conditions, contributing immensely to the visitors' 252 for nine on day four of the third Test here.

Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are copping maximum criticism for being walking wickets during the ongoing Test series against Australia but even Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant haven't shown the patience needed to survive Down Under. —*PTI*

HIL allows free entry for fans in Rourkela & Ranchi

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Hockey India League (HIL) on Tuesday announced free entry for fans to both men's and women's matches of the Hockey India League to be played at Rourkela and Ranchi. The eight-team men's HIL in a new format will start on 28 December at Rourkela's Birsa Munda Stadium and will conclude on 1 February, 2025. The women's edition comprising four teams will be held at Ranchi's Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda AstroTurf Stadium from 12 to 26 January. The HIL also said select matches of both men's and women's categories will be held at alternate venues to "expand the league's reach". "By foregoing revenue from ticket sales, we aim to build a stronger connection between the sport and its passionate supporters," it said. —PTI

Kerala Blasters retains Korou Singh until 2029

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Indian Super League (ISL) outfit Kerala Blasters FC announced that young attacker Korou Singh Thingujam has signed a contract extension with the club until 2029, the ISL said in a statement on Tuesday. The 18-year-old joined Kerala Blasters FC in August 2023 after a standout performance at the 2023 AFC U-17 Asian Cup. His performances earned him a call-up to the senior team for the 2024 Super Cup, becoming the youngest-ever player for the club. Singh made his ISL debut on 6 April, 2024, and provided his first assist on 7 November against Hyderabad. Singh's rise continues in the 2024–25 ISL season. —PTI

India to host World Boxing Cup Final in November 2025

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

India is set to host the World Boxing Cup Final in November next year, reaffirming its support for the breakaway World Boxing (WB) body. Boxing Federation of India (BFI) will also simultaneously host the third World Boxing Congress, which will include elections for the Presidency and Executive Board. The tournament will be the first international event hosted by the BFI after opting to join the new governing body earlier this year. The date of the tournament will be confirmed in January. The first World Boxing Cup of the year will be held in Brazil in March, followed by competitions in Germany, Kazakhstan and India. Formed in April last year after the IBA was stripped of its status, WB has reached 60 members as the IOC is expected to take a call on the recognition early next year.—PTI

3RD TEST

England lose wickets, NZ dominates on Day 4

HAMILTON, 17 DEC

Jacob Bethell and Joe Root made half centuries in a 104-run partnership but both fell before lunch Tuesday as England battled to save the third test against New Zealand on the fourth day.

Root was out for 54 after compiling his 65th half century and 101st test innings of 50 or more while Bethell posted his third half century of the series and fell for 76.

At lunch England was 193-5, still trailing New Zealand by 464 runs with Ollie Pope 17 not out and Gus Atkinson 19.

England has an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series after winning the first test by eight wickets and the second by 323 runs.

England began the day at 18-2 after losing Ben Duckett and Zac Crawley late on the third day and after New Zealand declared with a mammoth lead of 657.

The tourists lost Root, Bethell and Harry Brook (1) in an extended first session.

The England batters were unsettled by another fiery spell by New Zealand fast bowler Will O'Rourke who, bowling with a strong wind at his back, reached speeds of 153 kph. —*PTI*

Mandhana in top 3 ICC rankings

DUBAI, 17 DEC

India's vice-captain Smriti Mandhana has surged three places to the second in the latest ICC Women's ODI rankings while climbing one spot to the third among T20I batters, following her stellar displays against Australia and the West Indies.

The left-hander struck 105 in the final match of the series against Australia in Perth and 54 in the first game of the ongoing T20I rubber against the West Indies in Mumbai to headline the latest rankings update released on Tuesday.

Mandhana is the lone Indian batter in the top 10 as her skipper Harmanpreet Kaur moved down two spots to the 13th, while Jemimah Rodrigues climbed six places to the 15th and Harleen Deol moved up nine rungs to the 64th.

Among bowlers, Deepti Sharma has slipped two spots to the fifth. Arundhati Reddy jumped up 48 places to the 51st after a haul of four for 26, while Renuka Thakur has moved up from 28th to 26th.

Indian Vice-caption Smriti Mandhana PHOTO: PTI

England opener Tammy Beaumont advanced two places to the 11th after an unbeaten 65 helped clinch the South Africa series 2–1.

Ashleigh Gardner has moved up one place to the 16th with a 50 in Perth, Tahlia McGrath progressed from the 32nd to the 24th with an unbeaten 56 and Annabell Sutherland is up 15 places to the 29th.

Gardner is also up two places to the third position in the bowling rankings and has moved up from fourth to second in all-rounders' list. —*PTI*

INTER MILAN THRASH LAZIO 6-0 IN SERIE A

ROME, 17 DEC

Inter Milan delivered a stunning performance in Serie A, dismantling Lazio 6-0 at the Stadio Olimpico. The match was pivotal for both title contenders and saw Inter exploit defensive weaknesses from the home side.

Lazio, previously unbeaten at home, held firm for most of the first half; however, the tide turned just before the break. Hakan Çalhanoglu opened the scoring with a penalty four minutes from halftime, and Federico Dimarco quickly doubled the lead with a volley from a Denzel Dumfries cross.

The second half proved disastrous for Lazio, who were already missing regular defender Alessio Romagnoli.

The heavy defeat leaves Lazio in fifth place, while Inter climbs to third, just three points behind leaders Atalanta. —*PTI*

Premier League: West Ham, Bournemouth draw

BOURNEMOUTH, 17 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

Bournemouth salvaged a dramatic point at home against West Ham with a stunning free kick from Enes Unal in the final moments, securing a 1-1 draw in the Premier League on 17 December.

Both teams struggled to find their rhythm, with goalkeepers making crucial saves to keep the game scoreless. However, in the 87th minute, West Ham broke the deadlock through a VAR-assisted penalty after referee Chris Kavanagh ruled that Tyler Adams had handled the ball. Lucas Paquetá confidently converted from the spot, sending Bournemouth fans into despair.

Bournemouth, having dominated much of the second half, seemed to be on the brink of defeat until Ünal stepped up in the 90th minute, curling a stunning free kick into the top corner to earn his side a deserving share of the points.

"Credit to him, big moment, especially the reaction as well," said Bournemouth forward Ryan Christie. "I thought the boys were brilliant."

Christie expressed frustration over the penalty decision, highlighting inconsistencies in officiating.

Despite the contentious moments, Bournemouth displayed their characteristic resilience, now having secured nine points from losing positions this season. After the draw, they climbed to sixth place, just two points behind Manchester City, while West Ham remained in 14th position. —*PTI*

'FIT INDIA CYCLING DRIVE'

Sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya flagged off the 'Fit India Cycling Drive' at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium here on Tuesday. The event, held simultaneously in over 1,000 locations across India, was organised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports' Fit India movement, in collaboration with Cycling Federation of India PHOTO: PTI

Spain targets Euro 2025 clean sweep

LAUSANNE, 17 DEC

PHOTO: X

World Cup champions Spain are set to pursue a historic clean sweep of major women's football titles at the 2025 European Championship after being drawn into a group with Italy, Belgium, and Portugal.

A European triumph would round off an impressive haul for the Spain women's team, following their victory in the inaugural UEFA Nations League under coach Montse Tomé, who took the reins amid turmoil after their 2023 World Cup success in Sydney. Notably, Tomé is the only female coach in Spain's Euro 2025 group.

The tournament, hosted by Switzerland, will commence on 2 July, with the hosts facing Norway in Basel. Switzerland's group also includes Iceland and Finland. Meanwhile, the last two European champions, England and the Netherlands, find themselves in a challenging group with top-seeded France and Wales.

France coach Laurent Bonadei spoke of the exciting challenge ahead, highlighting the competitive nature of the tournament.

The final will take place at Basel's St. Jakob Park on 27 July, with over 700,000 tickets available for the 31 matches across eight Swiss cities.

Retired Swiss star Lara Dickenmann expressed optimism that the tournament could be transformative for women's football in Switzerland. Coach Pia Sundhage aims to field her strongest team, emphasising the significance of building confidence ahead of Euro 2025. —*PTI*

Americans pay $200K to players for Ryder Cup

WASHINGTON, 17 DEC

For the first time, US players participating in the Ryder Cup will receive a financial stipend under a new initiative from the PGA of America, which will allocate $500,000 to each member of the team, including the captain. This is a significant increase from the previous £200,000, solely designated for charity, established in 1999 prior to the Brookline matches.

The updated allocation comprises a $200,000 stipend for players and $300,000 that they can direct to a charity of their choice. US captain Keegan Bradley plans to donate his entire sum to charity. Don Rea, President of the PGA of America, emphasised the need for recognition of players' contributions to the Ryder Cup over the years.

The PGA of America's board approved the payment structure during a recent meeting. This change mirrors the PGA Tour's approach to the Presidents Cup, which began offering players direct payments in 2022.

Despite this new financial arrangement, Rory McIlroy has previously stated he would willingly pay to participate in the Ryder Cup, citing its significance and competitive spirit. Tiger Woods noted that the considerable revenue from the Ryder Cup could appropriately support numerous charities, adding that this development allows players to benefit. —*PTI*

DEFEATS KIRTI AZAD

Rohan Jaitley re-elected as DDCA President

NEW DELHI, 17 DEC

Incumbent Rohan Jaitley on Tuesday defeated former India cricketer and Lok Sabha MP Kirti Azad to become the President of the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) for a third successive term.

The 35-year-old son of former Union Minister late Arun Jaitley secured 1,577 votes compared to Azad's 777 in the race to the top position, which comes with a three-year term. His father had served as DDCA president for 14 years.

Total 2,413 votes were cast from among the 3748 members, and 1,207 votes were required to win.

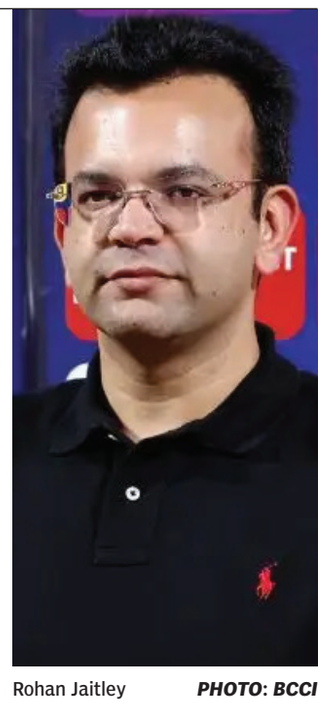
In 2020, Rohan was elected unopposed after Rajat Sharma resigned mid-term. The next year, he defeated advocate Vikas Singh to claim a full three-year run.

Rohan had the backing of former BCCI acting president CK Khanna, who is considered an influential figure in Delhi cricket as he controls more than 1,000 votes.

Khanna's daughter Shikha Kumar with 1,246 votes became the vice-president. Ashok Sharma (893) became the secretary, while Harish Singla (1328) was elected treasurer and Amit Grover (1189) won the joint secretary position. All office-bearers are elected for a three-year term.

Azad had alleged corruption in the DDCA in the run up to the polls. He said the association spent Rs 17.5 crore on installing floodlights when the much bigger Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad did the same for Rs 7.5 crore.

He also said administration failed to fully utilise the Rs 140 crore it received from the BCCI in the last financial year. —PTI



Rohan Jaitley PHOTO: BCCI